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OF

CHRISTIAN SINCERITY.

S.A. 1829
OF
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CHRISTIAN SINCERITY.

BY

JOHN PENROSE, M. A.

FORMERLY OF CORPUS CHRISTI COLLEGE, OXFORD.

For if these two things be supposed, that a man set before him honest and good ends; and again, that he be resolute, and constant, and true unto them; it will follow that he shall mould himself into all virtue at once.

Bacon's Advancement of Learning.

OXFORD,

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1829.

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THERE probably is no subject which can less require to be introduced by a preface, than that which is treated of in the following pages. No one doubts the value, or moment, of the virtue itself of sincerity: and there are but few, in whom its operation is not often disturbed by the natural proneness of every thing human to error, and more particularly by the contagion of self-deceit. An endeavour, therefore, to point out some of the more important applications of this great and cardinal principle, the dangers to which it is

liable, and the most effectual cautions by which those dangers may be resisted or escaped, cannot require either explanation or apology.

J. P.

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OF

CHRISTIAN SINCERITY.

CHAP. I.

OF SINCERITY IN GENERAL, AND OF THE SELF-EXAMINATION IMPLIED AND REQUIRED BY IT IN REGULATING THE CHARACTER AND THE CONDUCT OF LIFE.

It may seem strange to many persons, that we should ever meet with doubt or difficulty with regard to the import of so plain a thing as sincerity. Truth and falsehood seem to be as distinguishable as black and white. And so, indeed, they are, if we speak of them only in general. But, as all colours fade gradually into one another, so the most opposite qualities of mind are sometimes united in the mixed condition of human life. Honesty and dishonesty, sincerity and insincerity, are *words* of which we ap-

prehend clearly the meaning. In common cases they serve our purpose very well. The qualities which they denote are no less distinct and intelligible, than they would be if we could draw in all cases between them a broad line of separation. The words, or qualities, themselves, also, are no less distinct to a very imperfect, than in the best informed and most accurate, conscience. A child who tells a lie, and who by the greatness of the temptation may even apologize to himself for the telling of it, both knows the nature, and comprehends the guilt, of lying in general, as well, or better, than the ingenious philosopher, who may have accustomed himself to weigh the merit or demerit of actions in the nicest scales of casuistry.

Sincerity, therefore, in the general, is a quality sufficiently well understood. It is always understood also to be an essential constituent both of the moral and of the Christian character of the mind. But cases often arise with regard to the conduct allowed and required by it, which are by no means hastily to be resolved. The extremes

are easy and obvious, and, to a certain extent, we may give and take from both extremes with a very satisfactory degree of security. But doubt and difficulty must and will encounter us somewhere. We have to guard ourselves also especially against those errors of self-deceit, which often substitute in the place of truth only the semblance of it, either by vain attempts to reconcile with sincerity the pursuit of objects, which, if we do but seriously ask ourselves, we may know to be immoral and irreligious; or by dressing up our own weaknesses and inordinate passions in the garb of real virtue and piety.

That the *conduct* which a real sincerity justly requires of us, or that the *application* which we have to make of the principle, is not always promptly and clearly discernible, will farther appear, I think, from the following observations.

We tell every child that he must be sure always to tell the truth. Yet we tell him also that it is not to be spoken at all times. We check him almost as pointedly for telling tales, although the matter of the tale be per-

fectly true, as for many direct and absolute falsehoods. The child himself often shews evident marks of surprise at this apparent incongruity. Glad to tell the tale, although he supposes that his brother, or playfellow, will incur some censure, or other punishment, in consequence, he pleads to himself as the justification for doing what he is thus wantonly inclined to do, that he is only telling the truth, which he is bound always to tell. On meeting with a reproof, he is usually taken at unawares, at least till this lesson of reproof is become familiar to him: and though he submits to it readily, because conscious at heart of some impure or ungenerous motive, or at all events of some defect of true generosity, he still cannot combine his two precepts together. He must tell the truth, and yet he must not tell tales. Nature, feeling, example, bring him on both points a full conviction. But he is obliged to give up, as an object too hard to accomplish, his attempt to reconcile the two principles, the principle of sincerity which appears to invite him on the one side, and

that of honour which seems to beckon on the other.

Exactly in the same manner also as to the estimate which we form of the moral demerit and the legal punishment of libels. The truth, we know, will not justify them; and it is plain to every man of tolerable education, that there may be quite as much malignity, and quite as much harm done to society, in publishing truths which every principle of justice and kindness would lead us, if possible, to suppress or extinguish, as by giving circulation to the most absolute falsehoods.

In the same manner, though in a less degree, we have a right to blame that *bluff* free-spokenness, in which men who would pique themselves on being considered *privileged persons*, think themselves authorized, because they are *sincere*, to indulge. All sincerity, that can, *without pain*, offend against courtesy, will be found to partake of arrogance or uncharitableness. All conduct indeed which runs counter to any virtue whatever, may, with perfect justice, be termed

insincere. Thus we are told by Baxter, a man of exemplary sincerity in every period of his highly ardent and active life, that he himself repented and desired forgiveness of God and men, for having sometimes indulged imprudently his natural inclination to speak of every subject *truly*, or *just as it is*[a]. He might have been perfectly prudent,

[a] "And I have a strong natural inclination to speak of every subject just as it is, and to call a spade a spade, and verba verbis aptare, so as that the thing spoken of may be fulliest known to the world, which methinks is part of our speaking truly. But I unfeignedly confess that it is faulty, because imprudent, (for that is not a good means which doth harm, because not fitted to the end,) and though I feel no passion at such times in myself, it is scandalous, and a hindrance to the usefulness of what I write; and especially because, though I feel no anger, yet, which is worse, I know that there is some want of honour and love and tenderness to others; or else I should not be apt to use such words as open their weakness, and offend them: and therefore I repent of it, and wish all oversharp passages were expunged from my writings, and desire forgiveness of God and man." *Extract from the Life of Baxter in Dr. Wordsworth's Ecclesiastical Biography*, vol. v. p. 595.

no doubt, without being in the least insincere; and in any man whom we may suppose influenced, as even some good men may partially be, by the dangerous pride of expressing himself strongly or forcibly, or by any personal animosity against offenders, the making use of such language is not only to be wanting in "honour and tenderness," but is also to lose the praise, and forfeit the character, of a wholly irreproachable and entire *sincerity*.

Thus in the case also of those early teachers of Christianity, who set themselves up against the authority of St. Paul. These teachers, though doubtless convinced of the divine origin, and of the supreme importance, of the holy religion which they professed, are yet said to have preached in "envy and strife[b]." "Not ἁγνως," the apostle proceeds; and this word ἁγνως, our translators, without impropriety, render *sincerely*, though it implies much more forcibly than the word commonly so rendered, that moral temper of mind,

[b] Philipp. i. 15.

which is always a most valuable ingredient in all the more important processes of the understanding.

And here we come, as I conceive, at once to the true principle, by which, though the application of it will be sometimes difficult, the real value of all sincerity is to be tried. A true, and a moral, and, above all, a Christian sincerity, must of necessity be in a moral and Christian spirit of mind, and cannot possibly consist with any breach of that spirit, either by offending knowingly in any one point of duty[c], or by persisting altogether blindly, and without thought or discrimination, in the pursuit of objects, which, whether right objects or wrong, it has not sufficiently investigated or understood. Sincerity will be prompt, whenever it knows or sees itself right: but in doubt or difficulty is by nature cautious and deliberative. All human virtues have some alloy of imperfection, and sincerity itself, like every other, is fallible. But this should only teach us to

[c] James ii. 10.

guard the more against self-deceit, agreeably to the precepts of that most holy religion, which shews throughout a condescension to our infirmities, and which teaches the Christian to pray for protection against himself, not less than against those visible dangers, which assume the external forms of temptation.

I have already adverted to some of the most obvious cases of this most unhappy practice of self-deceit. I have spoken, for instance, of that roughness which takes the *name* of sincerity, but which is one form only of vulgar arrogance, or of pride. Other like cases, also, are coming before us perpetually. We often see roughness assumed, in order to flatter, by persons whose character enables them to adopt it more easily than any smoother, or more supple, mode of address. And yet these very people, so easily do they put a deceit on themselves, may not be aware of the real motive on which they act. Also, where there is no roughness, yet a mere precision of language is often both made, and considered, a point of importance, by persons of

whom we can hardly indulge the belief that they act from any principle which deserves the name of sincerity. I have known persons, who, I believe, would have scrupled to deny themselves, in the ordinary terms, to a visitor, yet flatter the vices of men of open and habitual profligacy, and this without having any personal object to gain by it, or none of which they were conscious at the time.

I may here also observe by the way, that even the telling of actual falsehoods is often a very inadequate and inaccurate measure of the real insincerity which belongs to a character. The vice of lying is, no doubt, always contemptible. I hardly see how any man can be a Christian who practises it. But it is a species of falsehood which has as much of weakness in it, as of guilt, and the weak man, I suppose, can never be *greatly* insincere. He who never dissembles only because he is consummately artful; because he knows that truth is the best policy; or dissembles but rarely in order that the opinion of his good faith may make his dissimu-

lation "almost invisible," or who reserves his "power to feign" for those cases only in which "no other remedy is to be found[d]," may be as much falser in character, than the habitual liar, as he is superior to him in talents

[d] "It is the weaker sort of politicians that are the great dissemblers. . . . . Certainly the ablest men that ever were have had all an openness and frankness of dealing, and a name of certainty and veracity: but then they were like horses well managed, for they could tell passing well when to stop and turn; and at such times when they thought the case indeed required dissimulation, if then they used it, it came to pass that the former opinion, spread abroad, of their good faith and clearness of dealing, made them almost invisible. . . . . But for the third degree, which is simulation and false profession, that I hold more culpable, and less politic, except it be in great and rare matters. . . . . The best composition and temperature is to have openness in fame, and opinion; secrecy in habit; dissimulation in seasonable use; and a power to feign, if there be no remedy." *Bacon's Essay on Simulation and Dissimulation.* It can scarcely be necessary to add, that it is not *morals*, but *politics*, of which this inimitable writer is speaking; and of politics too, not as they might be, but as history and observation had shewn them to him.

and in capacity. Accordingly it has been justly said by a very acute observer of children [e], that we are liable to exaggerate the guilt and importance of the actual falsehoods into which *they* are sometimes betrayed. None, at least, can have seen much of even the best children, in the earliest years of childhood, who have not observed how very near they sometimes run to the line which limits the exact truth of what they say. And yet on all these children we certainly must not fix the grievous charge of insincerity [f].

[e] Miss Edgeworth.

[f] The truth is, that we ought to estimate the *degrees* of sincerity, as we estimate the *degrees* of every other virtue whatever, in reference not only to the strict principle itself, but to the strength also of the temptations by which it is assailed, or, what comes to the same thing, our own strength to resist them. "If a beggar," says Taylor, "were tempted with the offer of twenty thousand pounds, the temptation would be too big for him, if he understood the sum; and possibly, if he be a virtuous man, and would not be tempted to tell a lie for twenty shillings, or for one of his own possible and likely sums, yet for so vast a heap of gold bigger than his thoughts, he might be put beyond

But to return to what I was saying concerning the great evil of self-deceit, or the impositions which men voluntarily practise on themselves. All these impositions are, doubtless, deeply to be lamented; but then we may surely hope that they will always easily become manifest on any impartial and dispassionate self-examination, at least to every one who fears God at all, and, who in his

his virtue. But therefore God, in his goodness to mankind, does seldom permit such trials and unequal hazards: and to our not being so tempted, (without disparagement to our virtue and our choice,) we may well confess we owe our innocence." *Ductor Dubitantium*, book iv. chap. 1. Works, vol. xiv. page 290. In the same manner it is observed by Butler, that "a very weak regard to virtue may be sufficient to make men act well in many common instances. And on the other hand . . . . . though a man be overcome, suppose, by tortures, it does not from thence appear, to what degree the virtuous principle was wanting. All that appears is, that he had it not in such a degree as to prevail over the temptation: but possibly he had it in a degree, which would have rendered him proof against common temptations." *Dissertation on the Nature of Virtue subjoined to the Analogy*, p. 457. edition of 1740.

calm and serious moments, desires to live as in his presence. If, whenever he is in doubt, any such person will but ask himself, "Am I, in reality, in all I am saying or doing, sincere? Am I, on one point, strict from principle, and will not that principle condemn my laxity on another?" he will find, if he does this, that he can no longer deceive himself, that if he falls into vice, it must be with his eyes open; or, perhaps, that the *stress* which he lays on some incontrovertible truths may have its real origin in his own voluntary indisposition to see them only as they are.

In the same manner also, almost every man who is in a passion, in the ordinary sense of the word, is in part blinded as to what justice requires of him. He half thinks he has a right to retaliate insult or injury. But he is probably conscious at the very time that he is doing wrong, and that he is working himself up both to a feeling, and to a conduct, which on reflection he will disapprove in himself, and which he would certainly censure in others. Even

a child will not only do many things in hot blood, which at another time he would certainly scruple to do, but he will argue with himself, at the very time, that his heat will render a conduct excusable, of which he is still clear-headed enough to see the malignity. Such, and so great, is the facility with which this error extends itself. But then in most cases the remedy is at hand. It is sufficiently clear that men ordinarily are self-deceived, only because they blind themselves wilfully, and that, even while they do blind themselves partially, they can seldom succeed altogether. There will, even in the worst cases, be some fissure in the dark cloud in which they involve themselves, through which a stream of light shall be visible. Although their practice of self-delusion may have become so inveterate as to extinguish all hope of their not preferring the darkness, they are still in some degree conscious that there is a light which shineth from heaven, and which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.

It appears on the whole, therefore, that a real and Christian sincerity properly consists in a deliberative and impartial habit of mind, and that the remedy to be adopted against those errors of self-deceit, which we are either prone to foster, or which come in upon us unawares, is to examine ourselves diligently in every case of doubt or of difficulty which may occur. We have also so to frame our temper, and so adjust our conduct, in reference to all our duties to God and man, that none of these duties be neglected, and none unduly preferred, but all, without exception, maintained, and cherished, and practised, according to their respective dignity and importance. A real sincerity requires nothing less than this. It cannot by possibility be either hasty or ignorant, supposing only that we have the time and means of informing ourselves. It is also apparent, that a sincere self-examination is, in most cases, a sufficient safeguard against error. And rules may be given, which, even in the cases of the greatest difficulty, may serve to regulate

our application of the principle, and so far at least to keep our footsteps in the right way, that we need not at any time be *over*-fearful of deviating from it.

The general rule for all cases, as may be collected from what has been said, is, that if any man suspects at any time the propriety of any feeling, or conduct, to which he may hope, perhaps, or believe himself to be impelled by any allowable or praiseworthy motive, he is to examine impartially whether, after consulting *all* principles, after inquiring into the *whole* of his duty to God and man, he still passes on it a sincere verdict of approbation, as being the conduct which, on the whole, he may, or ought to, pursue.

But, under this very general rule, it may often be wise to inquire specifically whether both piety and benevolence, the two greatest and most active of our moral principles, *if severally consulted*, are found to agree in recommending or sanctioning it. Without this caution, a man may be betrayed

by the phantom of piety into the commission of acts utterly foreign to its reality, as into the excesses of fanaticism and persecution. Into any such excesses he can scarcely fall, if he reflects, as he ought, that "the wisdom which cometh from above is peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, and without partiality[g]."

So also benevolence may be made the idol of the imagination, and set up in rebellion against the duty which we owe to God, if the prerogative of our duty to him be not, in all cases whatsoever, acknowledged. I pass it over as still more obvious, that no error can be accounted sincere, which is held as an excuse, or made a ground of defence, for any indulgence of personal vices. All denial, for instance, of the validity of the moral law by those who desire an emancipation from its restraints, must be a *voluntary* forgetfulness that the same authority

[g] James iii. 17.

which imposes the obligation of believing and embracing the Christian faith, requires us also to be unspotted from the world.

Of other more particular cautions, I shall speak fully hereafter. If still, notwithstanding them all, a man in his closet, with God's word before him, and with prayer to God to be guided aright in his determination, can be found in any case to decide or determine erroneously, I mean not by any thing which has been said either to question his real sincerity, or to imply, or surmise, that it will not always be held available by that God who alone seeth the heart.

But he is not sincere if he acts on any secret impulse or motive, which will not sustain the calmest inquiry, which will not bear turning in any light whatsoever. He must indulge no jealousy of his own pretensions, no unwillingness to see them brought into discussion, no latent fear that they may turn out to be unsound, or that by a sincere inquiry he may be obliged to

condemn himself in his own mind in any practice which he alloweth[b].

Yet in this last position there is one necessary reserve. It may happen, I believe, that as sincere a Christian as possible, the man most scrupulous not to deceive himself by indulging any pre-disposition which he may either know, or suspect, to be wrong, may yet be inclined, by far different and better motives, to suppress both in his own mind, and in his commerce with others, many doubts and discussions which may occur, or may be suggested, to him, on points both of opinion and of practice. This, I apprehend, he may do out of a conscientious distrust of himself, from fear of agitating and unsettling his own mind, or from the dread of doing mischief instead of good, to the persons with whom he is connected, and with whom he lives.

How far this can be done *wisely*, how far our investigation of absolute truth can or ought to defer to any of those weaknesses

[b] Rom. xiv. 22.

which the imperfection of the human faculties engenders, constitutes an inquiry of a very nice and difficult nature, and in which it must be impossible for us to draw any line very precisely. On the subject, however, of all such reservations, I shall have to speak expressly in future. For the present I have only to add, that, if the motive be conscientious, we imply, of course, and immediately, that it must be also sincere; and to repeat, that whether our motive be conscientious or not, a real and diligent self-examination can seldom fail to instruct us.

CHAP. II.

OF THE DOCTRINE OF CONSCIENCE, AND OF THE RELIANCE WHICH WE MAY PLACE ON OUR OWN CONSCIOUSNESS OF OUR SINCERITY.

CONSCIENCE differs from sincerity, only as conscience is a monitor, as it is one of the active impulses of our frame, as it approves, or disapproves, as it gives pain or pleasure in contemplation of, or in reflection on, our actions. Sincerity is probably the *character* of those acts which we feel ourselves bound to perform; conscience the *power* by which we are urged to perform them. Conscience also is an inquisitive, and, as has been said, I think, by Taylor, a *pragmatical* faculty. To act conscientiously, which is the very same thing as to act sincerely, it is absolutely necessary for us to *think*, to *consider*. To act merely on impulse, or on any opinion which we take

up at random, or on any unconsidered or insufficient authority, is to act blindly, and *without thinking* what we do. Conscience is a king, and of an undisputed prerogative: but then, as there was an appeal from Philip drunk to Philip sober, so conscience is not enthroned properly in his judgment seat, unless he have caution and impartiality for his assessors.

Of the solution of the problem, that it is always our duty to obey our consciences, even while we admit that the conscience may be sometimes in error, I have else-

[a] The most valuable treatise to be found any where on the subject of conscience, and more particularly on that natural supremacy which it has, or is entitled to have, in the human mind, is contained in Butler's Sermons at the Rolls. See particularly Sermon II. "In reality," says this great reasoner, "the very constitution of our nature requires that we bring our whole conduct before this superior faculty; wait its determination; enforce upon ourselves its authority; and make it the business of our lives, as it is absolutely the whole business of a moral agent, to conform ourselves to it." *Preface*, page xvi. xvii. Edition of 1729.

where treated expressly [b]. We must do what we think right, even though it be a thing wrong in itself; but then it is here implied, that we must do this sincerely, or that in doing it, we must, as was before said, *think* or *consider*. If, in such cases, the error be wholly involuntary, no guilt is contracted. Otherwise the guilt is transferred from the action itself to the criminal error in which it originated, and is often even aggravated by the transference so made. The habit of vice, moreover, may and will often destroy even the moral disposition and power itself; as habitual intemperance may destroy the bodily health altogether, and so that it shall be beyond the reach of art to restore it. But the agents are still responsible, because they have brought themselves into this miserable state, not, indeed, by a single act of error or negligence, but by contracting, voluntarily, that guilty habit, from which

[b] Inquiry into the Nature and Discipline of Human Motives, p. ii. chap. 3.

they are become at length unable to emancipate themselves [c].

It nevertheless remains indubitable, that even vice is guiltless, so far as it is wholly involuntary. Nothing is more remarkable, nothing more shocking, than that in a world which we know to be designed as a great apparatus for nursing up the human mind to virtue and piety, and to a capacity of eternal happiness, this benevolent design appears to be so often abortive. Not only human imperfection fails to improve and profit adequately by the happiest opportunities which are afforded: but there exist also every where around us large classes of human beings, to whom, if we look into their situation narrowly, we can scarcely see that any opportunities are really given. Both in cities, and in the country, there are many brought up in such brutal ignorance, in such irreclaim-

[c] The above paragraph is chiefly copied from Aristotle, (*Ethics*, iii. 5.) who has left but little to be added by any one to what he has said on the subject.

able habits of vice, and in such a state of war with all the better feelings, and all the civilized principles of society, that they can scarcely appear to us to be moral agents at all. Even those common and natural sympathies, to which both religion and morals appeal, seem in fact never to have reached, and indeed not to be able to reach, them. In this most melancholy case there is but one consolation: we still know that these unhappy beings will be judged only according to that which they have, and not according to that which they have not: that if their ignorance be total, so will their acquittal be also: and that for every even really good intention, however misdirected, which breaks through, or escapes from, the solid darkness by which they are surrounded, we know that an abundant recompence is ordained. For "wherever the understanding is wrong," yet so far always as "the will is right, the action is accepted, and the error pardoned, by God [d]."

[d] Taylor's Works, vol. xi. p. 519. 8vo. *Ductor Dubitant.* book i. chap. 1. rule ix.

So great always, even in cases where it is most imperfect, is the rich reward of all real sincerity. Also let us hope, that, in the unhappy case here referred to, though the eye of man may often be unable to discern any indications whatsoever of virtue, of the sincere desire to do right, or of a practical obedience to the dictates of conscience, yet that much may exist, and of course be visible to God, which our optics are not acute enough to see. Even among the lowest and most degraded castes of society, there is often a degree of *feeling*, of which persons of higher cultivation are disinclined to think them susceptible. A very low taste will often veil a high sensibility; and even in persons whom we may know decisively to be mean and fraudulent, we may sometimes see conduct which we should account the indication of delicate feeling, if we had observed it in persons of whom we had a better opinion, or whose faults were less known to us, or of whose character we had no means of forming a judgment. If thus, then, we often see amiable *feeling*, even

where we expect it the least, may we not hope that *principle* also, of which the indications are much more obscure, may be found much oftener under the same unhappy circumstances, than our own observation could, of itself, lead us to judge. And this the more reasonably, since the actual rule or principle, to which, if to any, persons so situated refer themselves, cannot but be expected to differ widely from our own *.

I now propose to inquire how far we may justly place reliance on our own consciousness of sincerity, and on the self-examination which it exacts and enforces. May not self-deceit, which may truly be said to lurk every where, poison even our faculty of self-examination itself, and operate, though unconsciously, to our ruin?

Undoubtedly it may be so: but notwithstanding all the dangers and errors which

* Inquiry into Human Motives, Appendix II.

are mixed up in the composition of human nature, it still remains true that men may always learn to know themselves, if not perfectly, yet in some tolerable degree. A man who is skilled in any of the ordinary arts of life, or in any study or science, may undoubtedly think himself better skilled in it than he really is, and by so deceiving himself may fall into mortifying errors. Nevertheless, we do not deny that a real proficient, if wisely on his guard against vanity, may be justly conscious of his own proficiency. So also in morals. A good father, a good husband, a good brother, master, or friend, must be supposed to know in some degree his own merit. And in the same manner a good Christian may entertain rationally some internal consciousness or assurance of virtue, though, as is proved by every page of Scripture, he is bound to watch this consciousness warily, and cannot ever have any ground for confiding in it, unless he evidences his sincerity by his works.

This, also, as I understand it, is St. Paul's

meaning in Romans viii. 16. where he speaks of the witness of the Spirit itself with our spirit. Much as the meaning of this text has been controverted, it is scarcely possible to avoid referring to it in treating of the reliance which we may be permitted to place on our own convictions of our Christian sincerity. The whole meaning, as I apprehend, of the passage is, that the spirit of adoption which had been spoken of in the verse immediately preceding, is an internal evidence or witness that we are the children of God, or, in other words, that we are Christians in sincerity. By the spirit of adoption is, I apprehend, meant either that sense itself and conviction of mind with which we humbly hope that we are thus truly his children; or else is meant the influence of the Divine Spirit itself, as it operates to infuse, and justify, in us a reliance on that very same sense and conviction. This text, therefore, I think, states expressly that their own internal convictions are, in some sense and degree at least, an evidence to Christians of their state with

regard to God and religion, or, in other words, of their own real sincerity. Nor does it appear to me that this interpretation states any thing more than on all accounts it is reasonable to believe. Deceitful as the heart is, we may still, as I have said, in some degree know ourselves, and may rely, in some degree, on the power and practice of strict and serious self-examination.

I shall now, therefore, propose briefly some of the chief observations and cautions by which our application of this principle ought to be guided.

I. In the first place, then, it is to be observed, that this assertion that we may, in some measure, rely on our own consciousness of sincerity, or on our inward sense and conviction that we are the children of God, and in a state of acceptance by him, is only a general, and not a universal, assertion. It is far from implying that every true Christian, or every person who is in a state of acceptance with God, is possessed neces-

sarily of this internal conviction of it. For a man, therefore, to be truly sincere, or in a state of acceptance, it is not *necessary* that he should possess that conviction. That conviction is, I hope, *commonly* the accompaniment of the other evidences which prove a man to be in that state, but not always so.

Also, when I here speak of *conviction*, I must not be understood to intend any *very* assured or determinate feeling of mind. Where we have the *infinite* before us, which we never *can* comprehend, where it is absolutely absurd and impossible for even the best men to draw any comparison between their own attainments in faith and holiness, and the immeasurable greatness of that reward which is promised to them, it were irrational to institute *too* nice a scrutiny into any of the correspondencies between the one point and the other. A *general*, and cheerful, though at the same time humble, and sober, persuasion, that all will be well at last with us, and that we may leave much, in an implicit confidence, to the known mercy and

loving-kindness of God, is the only species of *assurance* to which I would be willing to trust, in any degree, as a ground of reliance either on our own sincerity, or on his favour. Any hope, or *vision*, more definite, I should be apt to suspect of self-deceit, and of that spirit of *intrusion* into things which must in part be hidden from us, of which St. Paul speaks in the Epistle to the Colossians[1].

There is a passage somewhere in the Life of Baxter, all whose writings are most valuable, not only for the higher merit of their piety, but as shewing the workings also of his truly able and active mind, which may help, I think, to shew us what, on this difficult point, we ought to wish the Christian's sentiment to be. I cannot now find the passage, but I recollect that he is speaking, with great poignancy, of some defect or error, of which he has been accusing himself, and on which he reflects as if it had left behind a sting of the deepest anguish

[1] Col. ii. 18.

and misery. In the midst, however, of this self-reproach, he bursts out with a declaration, that, notwithstanding all this, he does not doubt of his salvation. Nothing, it appears, could deprive him of that reliance upon God. He had still ground enough to be confident that he might account himself sincerely his servant, and that he would not be frustrated of the hope of his calling.

This remarkable example may, perhaps, bring nearly before us what I should suppose to be the healthiest possible state of mind, in which a really good Christian should regard and estimate his own moral and religious condition. He loves both God and man so sincerely and fervently, that he cannot but feel acutely for every fault or imperfection which tarnishes the discharge of his duty to them, and he is at the same time so conscious that his love of both is real and true, that he does not doubt of what he knows will be its reward. This, perhaps, is the healthiest state possible for a man of highly vigorous powers, and of a truly apostolical zeal and devotedness. But in men

less gifted, the sensibility will often be less, and the confidence ought in general to be less *definite*.

II. Secondly: not only may a man really be sincere, and yet be destitute of the inward conviction that he is so: but also worse men, if men of sanguine hopes and tempers, may often entertain this inward feeling without having any grounds for indulging it. St. Paul says, that this feeling is a real evidence to Christians of their actual state, or sincerity. But he does not say that it is a feeling which, if hastily listened to, or incautiously consulted, will not lead them into error. On the contrary, this feeling is very commonly the result of a mere inflated vanity, and self-sufficiency. And this error is much worse than the other. For all errors that arise from self-sufficiency, or spiritual pride, are far more injurious to the moral temper in general, and far more inconsistent with religion, than any errors, if they must be called by that name, which have their root in fear, and often even in a religious humility.

III. Thirdly, as I have already observed, this internal conviction of mind is not to be accounted of as the sole, or even as the principal, evidence, which the true Christian possesses, of his sincerity. The apostle speaks of it accordingly only as one evidence, or as the fulness and accompaniment of all the other evidences which we may possess for coming to the same conclusion. Thus he speaks, in the verse almost immediately preceding, of our being "led" by the spirit. But to be led by the spirit, is to be led to a holy life. The spirit is *faith, principle, motive:* it is the good tree which bringeth forth good fruit. But as the fruit is the necessary evidence of the goodness of the tree, so is a holy life the necessary proof also of the purity and goodness of the spirit.

And so also in the concluding part of the very same verse in which the witness of the spirit is spoken of. "If so be that we suffer with Christ, that we may be also glorified together." Here we return again to that same holy life and conduct, which was

spoken of so short a time before, as the great proof of having a spiritual mind. For to *suffer*, in a religious sense, is to act, it is the very crown and fulfilment of well-doing, it is the good work of patience, in which as Christ our master contended, so his greatest and most active servants are also most called on to contend. Internal feelings, therefore, real evidence as, no doubt, they are of the state and religious sincerity of a Christian, may not be, and are not, an evidence on which it is just or safe to place an absolute reliance. We are bound to require also the evidence of facts, and perpetually to remind ourselves, that, unless a man does the works of God, he can have no reasonable assurance that he is one of his children.

IV. Lastly, it is to be remembered, that, however just, and however reasonable, however evidenced both by feeling and by fact, the conviction which we may at any time entertain of our sincerity, we can still rejoice in it only with trembling and humility. This privilege of a child, this

state of acceptance, this joint-heirship, as the apostle says, with our Saviour Christ, is not only to be gained by righteousness, but, after having been gained, it may also be lost again by sin. It is justly stated in our Articles, that "after we have received the Holy Ghost, we may depart from grace given, and may fall into sin." St. Peter is known to have fallen after having shared the personal love and instructions of our Saviour himself while he was on earth; and it is said expressly in the Epistle to the Hebrews, that men may "fall away" after they have been "enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift," after they have been "made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come:" and it is said farther, that it is "impossible," after such have fallen, (by the word impossible is here meant an extreme difficulty,) "to renew them again to repentance [k]."

[k] Heb. vi. 4, 5, 6.

Such are the principles, as I conceive, of that reliance which we have a right to place on our own consciousness of sincerity; and such, in general, also, the cautions by which it is limited.

CHAP. III.

OF PRACTICAL SINCERITY, AS AFFECTED OR INFLUENCED BY HUMAN IGNORANCE OR IMPERFECTION, OF THE DANGERS TO WHICH IT IS LIABLE, AND OF RULES FOR MAINTAINING IT.

DR. WHATELY, in a recent Essay on the love of truth, an Essay which undoubtedly tends no way to compromise the high and noble principle for which it contends, has the following passages concerning certain concessions or condescensions to human ignorance and imperfection, which, from the necessity of the case, he allows to be sometimes required.

"To teach any thing," he says, "which though in itself true, will inevitably be misunderstood by the hearers, is in reality to propagate not truth, but error: and if our teaching has in any case a necessary tendency to lead a certain class of hearers into such

mistakes as to other points, as we have no power to guard against, we are not enlightening, but leading them into darkness[a]."

"An objection sometimes brought, not so much against the pursuit as against the propagation of truth, is that the minds of many men are incapable of rightly apprehending it: that the attempt to teach some truths to such hearers as are not qualified for receiving them, and to remove some errors which they are not ripe for receiving as such, would only excite their disgust towards every thing which they might hear from such instructors; or that some might assent to what they heard, while they put the most mischievously false interpretation upon it: or, lastly, that they might misapply even what they had rightly understood; as persons ignorant of medicine often do mischief, by administering, without judgment, some powerful remedy whose efficacy they have

[a] Essays on some of the Difficulties in the Writings of St. Paul, Essay I. *On the Love of Truth*, p. 20.

witnessed. Even thus, it may be said, will the unlearned, when they have been taught to reject some long established error, proceed, when their minds are once unsettled, to reject well grounded doctrines also; and will apply the arguments by which they have been convinced in one case, to another, perhaps very deficient, (though they are incapable of understanding that difference,) so as to produce the most erroneous results. Accordingly, it is urged, our Lord himself, and his apostles, abstained from teaching every thing at once to their hearers, because they "were not yet able to bear them;" and even so important a doctrine as the extension of the Gospel to the heathen world was not fully made known to the apostles themselves for several years after they had received their commission[b]." "All this," it is justly added, "is in a certain sense true, and as far as it is true, is no contradiction of the principle I have laid down, but an application of it."

[b] Ibid. p. 18—20.

Nothing can be clearer than this: and such applications might, I believe, sometimes be carried somewhat farther than Dr. Whately would carry them, and into cases to which it appears, from other parts of his able treatise, that he would scarcely suffer them to extend. But the principle of sincerity itself must always be sacred; and I do not see that we can ever be allowed to concede any thing even to the most deplorable weakness and ignorance, which the admissions here made do not absolutely include and require. Truth, no doubt, in a certain sense, lies in "a mean;" but the great danger, almost universally, is the danger of carrying such sorts of concessions too far; of imagining a necessity where no necessity exists: of forgetting that sincerity is by nature a robust habit of mind, and truth itself a hardy plant; a plant which ordinarily suffers more from being overgrown by error, than from being nipped by severity, and which often pullulates the more vigorously from being cropped to the root.

The *relaxations* of this principle, the well meant *condescensions*, the *concessions* to human infirmity which particular cases have seemed at any time to require, these, it must be ever remembered, are the very evils of which we have had most to complain in almost all ages of the Church. The first and the greatest corruptions of Christianity have, it is well known, originated in this same persuasion, that a sincerity of principle may, and ought to be, modified in practice, by giving indulgence to human weakness and imperfection. Hence must have in part arisen, even in the age of the apostles, the disposition to interpret the doctrine of Christ in conformity to the existing opinions or prejudices, in favour of the Platonic or the oriental philosophers. It cannot be doubted but that one great motive for so doing was to promote its easier and more general reception. So also afterwards in teaching Christianity to put on the semblance even of the idolatries which it was intended to displace[c]. So in all the concessions which

[c] Bampton Lecture Sermons for 1808. Serm. IV. p.

have been made in later times by its mistaken expounders, to the native vice and self-deceit of the human heart; concessions which have almost identified with the reputation of craft and insincerity, the title of incomparably the ablest and the most learned of all the religious orders of the Church of Rome. And so also in the toleration of many noxious superstitions by the missionaries of that Church into heathen countries.

In all these cases, probably, the general end has been good: in many of them the greatest heroism has been exerted: and most of the agents, we may hope, have inherited the rich reward of the good and religious motive by which they were influenced. But the method adopted by them, that of admitting a spirit of compromise with human

99. Multa nomina antiquæ superstitionis, multi ritus et cæremoniæ retentæ, sed pia adhibita interpretatione omnia in melius versa, planeque, ut alicubi ait Beda, pertinaci paganismo mutatione subventum est, quum rei in totum sublatio potius irritasset. *I. Casaubon. in Bononium Exercit.* xvi. *cap.* 43.

prejudices and prepossessions, has, it is confessed, done more harm on the whole, done more to impede the real progress of the religion, than perhaps any other cause which can be assigned. We ought, therefore, it is said, to make no concession whatever, to abide always in all things, not only (for that is admitted) by the one universal and perpetually binding law of sincerity; but also by an application of it, which allows no truce, no indulgence, to any apparent prejudice whatsoever. For if, it is added, this line is once broken in upon, it will be altogether impossible for us to know where to stop: one concession will follow, one necessity draw on, another: and we shall at length be led by fatal, though gradual, steps, into the extremest laxity of principle, and the grossest errors and superstitions in practice.

All this is both so true and so important, that I almost scruple to allow that it ever can be qualified by any exception or reservation whatever. I admit most fully the greatness of the evil to which the principle of con-

cession to, and of compromise with, human weakness, has often led. Indeed I have endeavoured elsewhere to expose that evil distinctly[d], and to shew in some detail that the principle is in itself false and hollow, and an index of the corruption of those forms of Christianity in which it has too often been sanctioned and employed. Whatever immediate benefit it may appear to produce, its natural tendency is to obstruct the view of the evidences, and to impede the permanent reception, of the faith.

But then, again, we must be careful, on the other hand, not to hold, or to argue in extravagance, in that sort of darkness or error, which has above been spoken of[e], the holy cause of truth itself. The example referred to of our Saviour, who withheld some truths from his disciples, because they were as yet unable to bear them, and that of St. Paul,

[d] Bampton Lecture Sermons for 1808.

[e] See the extract from Dr. Whately, p. 41. of this chapter.

who "became all things to all men, that he might by all means save some," have not been communicated to us but for some end of instruction, for our own practical benefit; and even, if any parallel case should arise, for our own personal imitation. And it is the same, also, as I apprehend, with regard to the example of Moses, who permitted, as we know, a liberty to the Israelites, which is plainly not allowable to the Christian, and this not because it was a liberty good in itself, but on account, as is said, of the hardness of their hearts [f].

To this I think it may be added, that the fact itself, that erroneous concessions have been made so often, and to so great an extent, by persons acting on the most pious motives, is of itself a strong presumption that they at least border on some principle wholly consistent with a truly Christian sincerity. Few errors obtain much currency which are not akin to some truth, under the colour of which they gain their power of

[f] Bampton Lecture for 1818, Sermon III.

imposing on us. The very fact therefore which we have to lament, that Christianity has suffered so much from *undue* compliances with superstition or error, should lead us to expect that there may be found some *just* condescensions to human prejudices and infirmity.

The same conclusion, I think, may also be deduced from every history which we possess, of the propagation of our religion among heathen nations. All missionaries, even the sincerest, find it always a matter of difficulty to determine what concessions they may, and what concessions they may not, be allowed to make, to the opinions and practices of those to whom they address themselves. Some on this point are stricter, some more indulgent, than others: but, as far as I have read, it appears to be always a point of anxiety to fix where the innocence of such compliances ends, and where the guilt of them begins. They all think something allowable, and, as it seems to me, on the same principle on which St. Paul, as we have seen, conceded something to the

Jews. Nor in a case so critical, can I conceive it any way possible that men, many of them so irreproachable, almost all of them so disinterested, and who may be said in general to have given their lives for the Gospel, can ever have been absolutely and altogether mistaken. In the same manner I believe also, that those corruptions of the Church of Rome, into which it was betrayed originally by the desire of conforming to heathenism, indicate the propriety of some conformity or condescension to prejudices of a comparatively irreproachable nature. I do not believe that a Church, at one time comprising almost the whole Christian world, could have fallen into any errors of so serious a magnitude, if the ground on which those errors were erected had not been situate on the confines of truth.

I. Supposing it granted, then, that some concessions to human weakness must have place, even on the strictest principle of sincerity, one great caution, by which they may be protected from serious error, is, that we must, of course, exclude all concession to

idolatry, under whatever aspect or form[g]. And this exclusion cuts off at once one great source of those errors to which the teachers of Christianity among heathens ever have been, and ever must be, exposed. It is the very principle also of St. Paul's argument to the Corinthians[h], where he speaks of the practice of eating meats offered to idols. And it is moreover plain, that this apostle's toleration of ceremonies, which had been originally sanctioned by Him who was confessedly the true God, can never be any way drawn as a precedent in order to justify the worship of a false God[i].

In this example, moreover, of St. Paul, we may observe very particularly, *how* his policy, as it has been sometimes called, did not outrun his sincerity. That part of his history in which his *prudence* is most remarkable is in his steady refusal to permit it to be required of the Jewish converts to *reject* the ceremonies of the Mosaical law.

[g] Bampton Lecture for 1808, Serm. III. p. 62.
[h] 1 Cor. viii. 4—8. x. 25—30.
[i] Bampton Lecture for 1808, Serm. III. p. 68, 82—84.

The case, I suppose, implies, that it would have been too hard a trial of the infirmity of the human heart and understanding, to have attempted to emancipate the Jews, all at once, from all opinions and practices which had grown up, and become inveterate, in their long cherished habits and sympathies. To forbear the making of this severe experiment was therefore evidently consistent with a real, and even with a Gospel, sincerity. At the same time the apostle would never concede either to Gentile or Jew that these ceremonies were of any obligation on Christians. This was a point which concerned the truth of the faith, and on this he would never "give place, no not for an hour[k]."

II. The caution which I have next to add is, that every prejudice which we can possibly tolerate always ought to be rooted in principles naturally pious or amiable, and not in vice and immorality. Thus, if a Calvinist accept the doctrine of God's decrees, through fear that, by rejecting it, he may set up a will

[k] Gal. ii. 5.

of his own inconsistent with a pious and humble acknowledgment of the divine greatness and supremacy, although I think that doctrine both delusive and dangerous, I should certainly respect the piety of his motive, and, in any consideration of, or reference to, his particular case, if I should see a clear mischief from the unsettling his mind, I might think it unnecessary to controvert his error. Not so, if he embraces it for the sake of resigning himself blindly to the guidance of appetite or of passion. In the same manner in the case of the Roman Catholic, and even of conversions to Catholicism. We know that there have sometimes been cases, in which a broken-hearted penitent has been led to take refuge from all doubt and perturbation of mind, in the consolations of a Church which deems itself infallible. I have known this done from the most pious motives imaginable, and in that kind of agony in which a drowning man will catch at a straw. Now place, then, on his death-bed a person so circumstanced, with death nearly approaching. Suppose him, after all, scarcely able to stave off

distraction at the awful prospect before him. At such a moment, it would be even barbarous to argue with him, with any vehement pertinacity, against what we must still think his great error. But if it be his belief, that either in the penances or the absolutions, which that Church enjoins or administers, he can find a substitute for real holiness of life, our remonstrance and opposition must, no doubt, be constant and certain. We must withhold, we must minish, nothing, whatever the consequences.

III. Thirdly, in all the concessions which we at any time grant to the most imperative force of circumstances, and though, as I have endeavoured to shew, it must be just and right sometimes to grant them, we yet ought always to grant them unwillingly, and as a point extorted from us. All these concessions are justifiable only in the light of concessions to weakness, to a weakness which it is our bounden duty to strengthen, as far as our circumstances and opportunities permit. Truth is still to be a first principle with us, even when we cannot pursue it directly. Truth

is a fortress, without the occupation of which we can scarcely ever possess in security any portion of the country adjacent. And, though there may be other posts in the neighbourhood on which we can bring our forces better to bear, and on which it may be wise therefore to make our previous approaches, we can claim no *conquest*, without that fortress in our hands.

IV. To these cautions I would add, lastly, that in the common conduct of human life it is right always to *incline*, as far as circumstances will allow, to a great precision both of conduct and of expression. Without this caution, we may very easily lose our sincerity even without knowing where we lose it: but, while we observe this caution, we can scarcely be bewildered in any serious or mischievous degree.

One care is of the precision desirable in the use of formularies of expression, and particularly of those connected with religion.

The ordinary rule of morals is, that if we know that the words which we use are understood in a certain sense, or with a

certain latitude, by the person to whom we address them, we ourselves must or may use them in the same sense or latitude, whatever their strict or grammatical meaning may be. But then, on the other hand, it is for many reasons most desirable that all those abuses of words, which, to a certain extent, we know, cannot be avoided, should yet be avoided as much as possible. The abuse, accordingly, of custom-house oaths is universally confessed to be a crying evil, notwithstanding the casuistry by which they may be defended and justified. All such casuistry, however just, and though sometimes necessary, tends to confuse, like the distinctions of the Schoolmen, the immutable difference between falsehood and truth. All occasion for it, therefore, ought to be precluded, as far as may be, as far as can be accomplished without interfering with other duties, which a real sincerity may hold no less dear and valuable, than the exactest use of words which can be maintained. And we should study to preclude these occasions with the more care and earnestness, in all cases in

which we speak as in the presence of God, or in which we are engaged in his immediate service.

To these observations on the abuse of *words*, and in religion especially, it is to be added also, that there may be much evil in many *practices*, which though, like any force put on language, they may be *explicable*, on principles which, if recognized, make them innocent, are yet liable to misconstruction and error. Thus in the superstitions (and I can see no place for a softer word) into which, by a long tissue of unfortunate circumstances, the Church of Rome has most unhappily been betrayed, and from which she is either unable, or unwilling, to disentangle herself. Of all these superstitions some interpretation is always given us by the well-educated and intelligent members of that Church, which, if admitted and understood, is found to make them consistent with true piety and holiness. How else, indeed, could pious and holy men, of whom there are many, we trust, in every communion, ever espouse and

practise them, as undoubtedly they do, in sincerity? But that they require so much explaining, and so many distinctions, and are so far removed from all the *simplicity* of that worship which we are bound to offer in spirit and in truth, is a very sufficient reason for discarding them. Whatever may be the case with the wise, it is not possible but that the ignorant must often be led by them into the grossest of errors. The *ignorant* Catholic, when he receives a remission of penance, must assuredly often believe that his sins are, properly speaking, forgiven, by the virtue of that remission. Often also, when he offers prayers to the Saints or the Virgin, he renders, at least in part, that honour to them, which even his own *authorities* pronounce unreservedly to be due only to God.

That this is the fact, I apprehend that the ablest members of that communion themselves acknowledge, and unfeignedly deplore; though they treat it as only a perversion of institutions good on the whole; —as a perversion analogous to those delusions

of the imagination with regard to charms, or fortune-telling, or witchcraft, by which the vulgar of our own communion are often seduced, and from which we cannot hope that, while in a state of blindness and ignorance, they can ever be emancipated by any creed whatsoever. But the cases are wholly dissimilar. There is this difference between them, that the superstitions of ignorant Protestants spring up wholly in defiance not only of the principles, but also of the practice, of their religion, and without any countenance from it whatsoever. The superstitions, on the contrary, of the Church of Rome grow absolutely and immediately out of institutions which have that Church's sanction and authority.

At the same time I readily allow, that the pious members of that Church, who acknowledge and lament, and, I doubt not, would wish to remedy, errors, which, if they deny them to be in their Church itself, they must yet confess to be superadded to its institutions, are placed in circumstances of extreme difficulty. Those errors and abuses have been

introduced in general by little and little; and the origin of some of them may be traced back even to an early period of the establishment of Christianity. Under circumstances such as these, it requires a mind of much force, if acting on the dictate of conscience only, and not under the influence of some extrinsic inducement, to carry a member of the Roman Catholic Church so far as to abandon or to reject its communion; particularly if he be one who lives in a country in which its doctrines are held in comparative purity. Of all the events in history, I believe firmly that the Reformation comes next, in point of undoubted and extensive usefulness, to that of the original revelation of Christianity; and I value, as much as any man does, that liberty of conscience, which no struggle less decisive could have obtained. At that anxious period, however, and before matters had gone so far as to render conciliation wholly impracticable, I suppose that the best men, almost universally, were scarcely more desirous of an effectual reform of abuses, than they were also desirous that a reformation of

the Church from within might have removed, or lessened, the necessity of a separation from it. Many of these, the wisest and the most resolute, to our great benefit, did, in fact, decide to separate: but there were many also, and those men no less conscientious, who decided, on the other hand, still to adhere to the communion in which they had been originally brought up.

For the sake of all those who are still embarrassed with the same difficulty, it were fervently to be wished, that the Church of Rome may still be capable of receiving the amelioration which, we think, it evidently needs. If its numerous members could with any consistency become identified with us, in all the essential spirit and principle of Christianity, we would assuredly rather rejoice, than lament, to see them retain their ancient and venerable name and profession. But the history of that Church must, at all events, ever continue a memorable and mournful example of the evils created by carrying too far those concessions to human weakness, which we allow to be, in some degree, per-

missible and proper. Those evils might never have existed, if this error had not produced them; if, instead of conceding to that weakness, whatever the goodness of the end proposed might appear to warrant, it had rather been the maxim to adhere as closely as possible to a strict simplicity of expression and worship. Such simplicity we believe to be, in general, the quality most suitable both to the strength and to the infirmity of our own nature, and we know it also to be the most acceptable to God.

CHAP. IV.

OF THE OBLIGATION IMPOSED BY SINCERITY EITHER IN ADHERING TO, OR DISSENTING FROM, ANY RECEIVED DOCTRINE OR ESTABLISHED FORM OF CHRISTIANITY.

THE case which I shall now consider is that of the principles on which we have to apply our great, and cardinal, and universal law of sincerity, in determining either our adherence to, or our dissent from, any received doctrine, or any established form, of Christianity. That mere birth or education, or that any unreasoning impulse or preference, should be allowed to decide for us in this so important a point, is evidently inconsistent with sincerity altogether. If birth or education were the only authorities we need to regard, in a concern so momentous as that of our religion, we all of us in this island, after all the opportunities afforded of acquiring

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the light and blessings of revelation, might have remained to this day the deluded but blameless votaries of Druidical superstition and cruelty. And to allow ourselves to be guided by any other unreasoning preference is much less excusable, probably, than to be guided by these authorities. Still worse, also, if we allow our faith to be the result, not merely of accident, not merely of bigotry, but even of some malignant passion, or of some corrupt interest of our own.

That a man's faith *may* be thus influenced, and yet he himself self-deceived, must be but too plain to all who look narrowly into the remoter causes by which human actions are influenced. It is in religion, as in politics. We see the profession or party determined, and we can sometimes even predict how it will be determined, either by the ruling temperament, or by ambition, or covetousness, or by some other perturbing force. And yet, all the while, the agent himself shall be, in whole or in part, unconscious of the existence of that ruling power by which his actions are really swayed. There are many

who are republicans out of mere personal pride and jealousy, and because it is intolerable to them to endure a superior. There are many, who have trained themselves into an actual hatred of freedom, because they imagine that their own interests are opposed to it. Yet many also of these persons are far from being aware of the true nature of the motive on which they act. Many, with the like unconsciousness, are Dissenters, or Churchmen, from precisely the same or similar inducements.

And so as to creeds. Many are doubtless made Socinians, not so much by the process of argument, as by their proud indisposition to accept, even from the hands of God himself, a dispensation which they cannot wholly comprehend. Many are Calvinists, because they are glad to catch at a doctrine, which, in its abuse at least, serves to blind them to the guilt, and the consequences, of personal vice and corruption. In all these cases I suppose the parties in some sense sincere; or that the actual inclination of whatever judgment they form does go along with the opinion which

they avow. But it is also no less easy to see, that, though their judgment be really wrong, they have not that sincerity, which can be held as an excuse for their error; and that the guilt attaches, if not to the error itself, yet to the motive from which it originates[a].

That I may not, from what I have said, be thought to judge any way uncharitably of the ordinary motives, which give origin and currency either to the Socinian, or to the Calvinistic opinions, I beg to add, that I have not intended to say any thing of them, which all their considerate adherents do not, I believe, readily, though, no doubt, painfully, acknowledge. For its acknowledgment by the Calvinists, we need only refer to the writings of by far the ablest and most eminent of their divines, whom our own age and country have seen[b]. Nor can I doubt but

[a] See chap. ii. p. 25.

[b] "Sure I am that evangelical religion is in many places wofully verging to Antinomianism—one of the vilest heresies that ever Satan invented: our natural pride and carnality being both humoured and fed by it." *Life of the Rev. Thomas Scott*, p. 201.

that the Socinians must acknowledge it also. Grievous seems to me their error, and full and productive of the very worst practical mischiefs: nor, indeed, can I even imagine any thing more inconsistent with the whole framework and meaning of Christianity, than to hold that the Saviour either is not God, or is such a God only as the Arians make of

"The *conversion* of the Antinomian, notwithstanding all his good feelings, only leaves him tenfold more a hater of the God of the Bible than he was before. This I am sure of, and see more and more clearly every day: and the enmity of loose professors against searching practical preaching is full proof of it." *Ibid.*

"There are above two thousand inhabitants in this town, almost all Calvinists, even the most debauched of them: the Gospel having been preached among them for a number of years, by a variety of preachers, statedly and occasionally, sound and unsound, in church and meeting. The inhabitants are become, like David, wiser than their teachers, that is, they think themselves so, and in an awful manner have learned to abuse Gospel notions, to stupify their consciences, vindicate their sloth and wickedness, and shield off conviction." *Ibid.* p. 207.

him. Yet still I think I have seen in some of those who have fallen into this error, a no less sincere piety, a no less exemplary humility, than our own happier and more consistent creed could have taught them. These persons had, I believe, by God's great goodness, gained the end of practical holiness, although they had missed of the best and surest means of arriving at it. But all such persons as these, whom surely, though in error, we must account sincere, cannot but be sensible that much impurity of principle has often operated to bring men over to that creed, which they themselves have embraced from purest principles. Many, I am persuaded, have embraced it with a humble and pious misgiving of mind, and only from an unfounded fear of idolatry. And the very purest creed also, whether established or not, must often have adherents from other motives than that of its purity: from corruption, from bigotry, from utter indolence of mind, or from mere aversion to some party in opposition to it. By the word adherents, I am here far from mean-

ing hypocrites. I am, of course, speaking of persons, who frame their judgments, as many do, to go along with that profession, or party, to which by some motive, and that motive often a bad one, they are unconsciously inclined to adhere.

For all these errors the proper remedy is to be sought in diligent and humble self-examination of mind. And this exercise, wisely conducted, we must hope, will be always adequate to the detection of at least the worst of those errors, the most unchristian, and the most malignant. With the Scripture in our hands, and more especially with prayer to God that he will guide us in that introspection into our own consciences, in which our own weakness is so apt to delude us, assuredly we may hope that all gross vice, or corruption, will shew themselves to us in their just and natural form.

But the question here before us is not properly of gross vice, or of any radical malignity or corruption, but of those errors chiefly into which men of good but scrupulous minds are liable to fall, in determining

a point, which, though of much moment, is also often of extreme delicacy. I may here, I think, assume, that to unite in the same profession of faith, and in the same exercises of devotion, to which our friends and our fellow Christians adhere, is and must be good, if we can so unite conscientiously. It would be easy to prove that the consent of numbers, if honestly given to any creed or confession, is a great protection of the faith of each individual against unsteadiness and vacillation of mind[c]. Neither is it, in any degree, less important to devotion than to faith. We cannot, or at least cannot ordinarily, account of religion as a private matter, or as a matter which is only between God and ourselves, and exclusively of the bond of sympathy with our fellow creatures.

[c] The advantage thus derived from Christian communion or fellowship, and the use of creeds or formularies of religion, as they constitute a preservative against vacillation of mind, or against scepticism, will be more fully considered in the concluding part of chapter v.

It is certain that, if we do so account of it, we shall lose much of its spirit. And all this, it must be observed, is true without entering in the least on the ground of Church authority, though that ground appears to me to be by no means weak, and though, if admitted, it would decide *many* questions at once.

The way of religion is over an open country; with the ultimate object before us, in general, plainly discernible, but the ground to be traversed often uneven. Many pilgrims keep one track: some keep another, and there are some who pick out their own way for themselves. But they who keep in bodies advance with the more resolution of mind [d], and not only with less apprehension of missing the road, but with the greater vigour also, and alacrity of step.

To think, therefore, and act in communion, to accept the same formularies, to unite and to agree in the same profession of faith, and in the same devotional ex-

[d] Sic minus via lædit euntes.

ercises and acknowledgments, must evidently be an advantage of no light moment to Christians; and is, indeed, I suppose, admitted almost universally so to be. The question is, and is only, if this can be done in sincerity. It is clear that opinions differ, and that where many tracks are visible, and there is a wide and open field to choose in, all will not, and do not, concur in the choice.

Suppose that all men were left wholly to themselves to chalk out their own exposition of their religion. Temper, opportunity, and all that variety of temptation, and all that variety of moral infirmity, to which we are all so variously inclined, might make almost every man to vary, in some shades at least, or some colourings, from any exposition of it which his neighbour might draw up. For these persons to unite, therefore, or to unite altogether, it is clear that one or both of them must sacrifice something. There *must be* some concession or compromise of private opinion.

But how can this be sincere? how, in the affairs of religion especially, in which the

truth itself and our own conscientious profession of it, is always an indispensable essence and element, can any *compromise*, or any *sacrifice*, ever have place?

None can have place, assuredly, in which any portion of real sincerity can be for a moment lost or forgotten. But to bring the question to a point, or rather to shew the principles on which to answer it, it will be most desirable to propose a particular case.

One province, then, it may be justly said, and a very essential one, of all real and rational Christian sincerity, is to be adequately satisfied concerning the genuineness of those writings which have come down to us as of divine inspiration.

What other inquiry, it may be said, can be of more importance than this? Must it not be our first duty, (it undoubtedly is so, speaking *in general*,) to be fully assured that what we accept as the word of God, is his word, of a truth, and not the word of

man only; and that we do not either add or subtract "one jot or one tittle" from the record which he has given us of his will?

Are there not many passages however, of the received text of the Scripture, which we even know not to be genuine? Of these how can we consistently admit any one? But say that all were genuine with one single exception, or, to give an instance, with the exception of a passage in Gal. iii. 1. which is wanting in the best manuscript, and which, it is agreed by biblical critics, ought certainly to be rejected. How can we dare then to give this manifest interpolation a place in the text of Scripture itself? How can we adopt a canon which ratifies it? How can any clergyman, who in reading the Scripture to his congregation undoubtedly pledges his own faith in its integrity, sanction by reading it a claim he knows to be false? How can any layman continue a member of any Church which thus imposes on him, and knowingly imposes, falsehood for truth?

But now turn to the passage referred to[e], and observe how utter the folly and worthlessness of all this most inapplicable declamation. This declamation would, indeed, be argument, would be just reason and true piety, if justified by the importance of the interpolation: but I have purposely selected an insignificant passage, in order to shew the more distinctly that, even when verbally true, all such objections, to be *valid*, to be *sincere*, must be also really important. Is there, can there be, a human being, who, on such an objection as this, would think himself justified in grounding any separation from persons linked to him by *any* bond of Christian charity? If there be, the man who would strain at this *gnat*, is the person whom I should the soonest expect to swallow a *camel*. Pride perhaps renders him singular, or irreligion unsocial: or at the very best he is a man whose *scruples* must not be dignified

[e] "O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, *that you should not obey the truth?*" The words interpolated are those here printed in Italics.

with the mistaken title of *sincerity*. An impartial sincerity would lead him to do his *whole* duty; or, if he could not do all, to neglect the mere trifle, the mere tithe of mint, or anise, or cummin, if, from any cause, put in necessary opposition to any weightier matters of the law.

The principle, therefore, which was laid down is quite incontrovertible. And though I have alleged, no doubt, for the sake of distinctness, an extreme point of the case, yet the whole case, as it exists, does not in reality differ essentially from that extreme point of it which I have alleged. Not one text indeed alone, but many texts, and some of them texts which have been held to be of importance, are almost confessedly either spurious or corrupt. The verses, for example, Acts viii. 37, and 1 John v. 7, and the word Θεὸς in 1 Tim. iii. 16, are by the best critics considered evident interpolations: and the useful and affecting parable of the woman taken in adultery is universally admitted, even by those who believe it to be genuine, yet to rest on an authority very sensibly in-

ferior to the other portions of the Gospel history.

Yet if, as is most certain, no one principle either of faith or of practice is in the least degree dependent on these passages, or in the least degree affected by them, if the current of the history still goes on as before, and all the apostolical doctrine be still untouched and unshaken, it were only an outrage on the true principle of sincerity to have any scruple on so immaterial a point. Most wisely and fairly, therefore, has a recent editor of the New Testament, instead of applying himself to defend the authority of the received text, even in cases where it might perhaps be defended successfully, rather chosen to employ himself in shewing the collective unimportance of all the errors which we can apprehend to subsist in it: "*Quantulum* sit," he says, "in textu recepto, post tot codicum et versionum collationem, quod ulla ex parte merito reprehendi possit[f]." In all such cases,

[f] Novum Test. Oxon. 1808. *edente J. White, S. T. P. Edit. ratio.*

indeed universally, the *quantum* is every thing: and a real sincerity will no less urge us to tolerate many real imperfections, which we know cannot be removed, without the risk, and even the certainty, of serious evil, than it will urge us to remove them as far as we can do it with safety, or to dissent altogether if the mass be too heavy, and of a burden greater than we can bear.

This also is the principle which seems to be universally acted on, where no extrinsical disturbance takes place in the natural and healthy state of the understanding. No Protestants, not even the clergy, think that their adoption of the received text fetters their liberty of discussing alleged interpolations of it. Nor do they think themselves precluded, or are ever thought to preclude themselves, by their adherence or assent to the established canon of Scripture, from the freest criticism of some subordinate parts of it. And so too our Dissenters, who, with very inconsiderable exceptions, unite in the reception of our authorized version. This they also do, not from thinking it perfect, nor even, as I sup-

pose, from any wish to limit or lessen the points of difference, on which they are divided from our communion; but because they think justly, that where they see not any error of magnitude, it is the just dictate both of reason and of sincerity to overlook all inconsiderable blemishes. And even in matters of a much more practical importance than almost any which concern the text or the canon of Scripture, the same rule ought in sincerity to be adopted. It is a rule given us in general by the purest minded of all casuists[s], that "though an error is not to be permitted in any Church, when it can be peaceably amended; and, when it cannot, it is, as often as it can be, peaceably to be discouraged: yet when the necessity [of tolerating it] is great, and the evil feared [in any attempt to remove it] is certain, and felt, and is intolerable; it is a sad necessity, but no man can help it, and therefore it must be, as it may; the lesser error is to be endured till

s Taylor, *Ductor Dubitantium*, book i. chap. v. rule 8. vol. xi. p. 143. Heber's edition.

it can be remedied, with a remedy that is not worse than the disease."

This rule, these principles, seem also to be universally admitted, and without, so far as I know, the least suspicion or difficulty, on that very point, on which I should say that, rather than on any other, a degree of scrupulousness is religious and reasonable. In matters which affect not either practice or faith, it requires but little proof that it is clearly wrong to be over tenacious, or to sacrifice to mere punctilios of expression any thing of a truly Christian feeling or charitableness.

But in actual worship such punctilios rate higher. In prayer, or in thanksgiving, it is of a far greater importance to make our expressions the exact vehicle of what we feel. At the same time it must be much harder to express such feelings exactly in common, than to comprehend precisely in any one code, or canon, or system, any creed of speculative opinions. The cool and the ardent, the impassioned and the contemplative, commonly differ far more in temperament than

in faith. Equally acceptable, we may hope, because equally sincere, in the eyes of the same God, whose Spirit worketh in a diversity of operations, yet the deep prostration and self-abandonment of the one pours itself forth naturally in strains often very unsuitable to express the more chastised devotion of the other. Who will say of SECKER that he was a man less good or truly religious, than the venerable ANDREWES, a man so strongly contrasted with him in the tone, and temper, and whole character of his mind? Such men must give up something, if they will unite with each other in any exercise, or work, or labour, even of love. And this they do, and on strict principle; and though with some stress perhaps on their feelings, yet without any the least sacrifice of real sincerity. It is sincerity itself, indeed, which here teaches concession, and which instructs us that, "though we weigh never so exactly, we may miss grains or scruples: but to snatch greedily at the little overrunning dust of the balance, and to throw away the massive ingots that weigh the scales down, is the great-

est folly in the world[h]." It is no less plain also, that all the rise and the reasonableness of any such, or of any species of concession, takes its original in human infirmity. For if all were perfect, all would be like-minded: if there were no passion, no ignorance, and no self-deceit, either no errors would exist, or if they existed, they would be soon remedied, and without any incidental or consequent evils to be apprehended any way from the remedy itself.

In much of what has been said, I believe I may add, that the name of Baxter, to whom I have already in a former chapter referred, has been again forcing itself on my recollection. Baxter's high credit, the skill and energy of his argumentation, and, above all, the fervent piety of his character, must ever retain an indelible impression in the

[h] Taylor's Works, vol. xi. p. 184. *Ductor Dub.* chap. vi. rule 5.

minds of all who are acquainted with his works, or his history. At the time in which he lived, that path could scarcely be easy, in which a mind like his was perplexed; those obstacles could scarcely be futile, which had the effect of separating him from the great body of his profession; from men with whom his truly Christian sincerity, tinged as we may allow it to have been with the spirit of party, could not but have been most desirous to unite. The lapse of time has now removed the adventitious obscurities, which in his eyes invested with a disproportionate magnitude *most* of the objects for which he most warmly contended. The same party feeling, the same unconscious disposition to swell real difficulties into an unreal importance, is to be found equally in almost every age. But there are few persons *now*, who, however they may sympathize both with the man and his party, in whatever degree they may share his temper, or his infirmities, yet do not acknowledge that, in any dispassionate estimate of the points at issue between him and his oppo-

nents, his zeal was overcharged and unreasonable. There are few, who, though they may even now like him the better, for the very reason of his non-conformity, yet can think that, if he had lived in our own times, he would still have thought himself to have adequate reasons to justify it; or, at least, that he would have justified it by the same reasons. As we know that he would have conceded something in his own times, so we may be assured that he would have conceded more in ours. And of this indeed there is sufficient evidence in what he has said of himself in a memorable passage written late in his life, and in one of his happiest, certainly, and serenest moments.

"I am much more sensible," he says, "than ever, of the necessity of living upon the principles of religion which we are all agreed in, and uniting in these: and how much mischief men that overvalue their own opinions have done by their controversies in the Church: how some have destroyed charity, and some caused schisms by them, and most have hindered godliness. . . . I am not

too narrow in my principles of Church communion as once I was. . . . I am much more sensible of the evil of schism, and of the separating humour, and of gathering parties, and making several sects in the Church, than I was heretofore. For the effects have shewed us more of the mischiefs. . . . I am deeplier afflicted at the disagreements of Christians, than I was when I was a younger Christian. . . . I have spent much of my studies about the terms of Christian concord, and have over and over considered of the several ways which several sorts of reconcilers have devised. I have thought of the Papists' way, who think there will be no union, but by coming over wholly to their Church, and I have found that it is neither possible nor desirable. I have thought and thought again of the way of the moderating Papists . . . and of those that would have all reduced to the state of the times of Gregory I. . . . and that the doctrines and worship which were then received might prevail. And for my own part, if I lived in such a state of the Church, I would live peaceably, as glad of unity, though

lamenting the corruptions of tyranny. . . . If I were among the Greeks, the Lutherans, the Independents, yea the Anabaptists, (that own no heresy, nor set themselves against charity and peace,) I would hold sometimes occasional communion with them[1]."

Illa tanquam cygnea fuit pœne divini hominis vox et oratio. Such was his judgment, when his mind was now cleared from the perturbations of his long-continued and too fervent conflicts and controversies. Thus charitably could he think of many, from whom he still differed widely; differed, indeed, beyond the possibility of entire reunion in a world in which, as we cannot be perfect, so we cannot all hope to be comprehended in all things by the common bond of perfectness. So entirely had this strong spirit at length taught himself to feel that charity is in all things the fulfilling of the law, and that "by degrees of this virtue,"

[1] Extract from the Life of Baxter, in Dr. Wordsworth's Ecclesiastical Biography, vol. v. pp. 563, 576, 579, 580, 584. See also p. 578, 579.

as our benign Taylor on the same point expresses himself, "a man tends to perfection, and not by *forms* and *tittles* of the letter, and *apices* of handwriting or ordinances[k]."

[k] *Ductor Dub.* chap. vi. rule v. p. 183.

CHAP. V.

THE SAME SUBJECT CONTINUED; AND OF THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SINCERITY AND SCEPTICISM.

SOMETHING, therefore, doubtless, is *due*, something reasonably ought to be *given*, to the moral circumstances in which we find ourselves placed. That this is, and must be so, is not less the law of *sincerity*, than to keep our minds in principle open and equitable: always disposed to buy real truth at any price, to "buy and sell it not[a]."

On the particular importance of any particular set of circumstances it is not by any means my intention to dwell. Much is due to antiquity, much, I think, to the institutions of the country in which we happen to live, much to the opinions of those who

[a] Prov. xxiii. 23.

ought to have weight with us; though all this still in subordination to our own free but considerate decision on every point whatever, both of duty and of faith. It is ours to decide,—we are, each in his own case, the jury:—but it is a high arrogance not to listen to the judge. Also, as was said before, I cast no blame whatsoever on those who think it safer to err on the side of a somewhat too stiff and rigid a maintenance of their own private judgment or opinion, than on the opposite side of conceding a little too much to the apparently imperative force of circumstances. This, I believe, may be so: it may be a less evil to be too stiff, than it is to be too relaxed, either in faith or in conduct. But, granting the principle, it is still possible to make a very intemperate application of it.

Neither do I confine, by any means, to any one body or communion of Christians, the right, or duty, of alleging the circumstances in which they are placed, to qualify the application of that universal law of sincerity, to the principle of which we are

bound always to adhere. I am myself persuaded that they can no where be pleaded more wisely, no where alleged more conscientiously, than when pleaded or alleged by the members of our own Church establishment, in order to justify their Church union with one another; notwithstanding some speculative or practical differences; or some opinion that in the formularies to which they assent, or in the discipline to which they bind themselves to adhere, some unessential blemishes are to be found. And, to say the least, I believe them ordinarily to do this, with full as much and as unimpeachable a sincerity, as that by which Christians of other views, or other principles, are ordinarily led to dissent from us. That Churchmen, in general, or that the more learned and rational portion of them, either *sigh* or *smile* over their Articles or their Liturgy, is a calumny which no person who inquires sincerely into the fact can be ever ignorant enough to believe.

But then, again, to these circumstances, which appear to us so highly important to

keep us steadily in the track which we follow, we do not deny that there are other analogous circumstances in the case or situation of the Dissenter himself, which may fairly incline *him* rather to hold his own way, and to be indisposed to come over to ours. To our attachment to the forms and doctrines of an establishment, which we justly value both for its authority and antiquity, for the venerable names by which its annals are adorned, and because framed on the apostolical model, he may oppose, and with equal relevancy, the contrary bent of his own education, or the opinion of persons who, in their position towards him, may doubtless be the persons whom he is most bound to revere. Say that the son, say that the daughter, of a Dissenter, of a man amiable both in his conduct and in his principles, begins to inquire in early youth into the nature and import of the inestimable revelation common to all of us. Here surely we cannot but hope that a *father's* authority both is, and ought to be, higher and dearer than that of names which in the public eye are more

splendid, or even of reasoning, which, we may be satisfied, is decisive. Again, in another case, we argue, and I think justly, that our establishment possesses on us the stronger claim, because it is an institution sanctioned by the State. This *circumstance* may be of itself enough for us, if we are free to choose, or unless it seem to us a Church materially erroneous on any considerable point of doctrine or discipline. But an hereditary Roman Catholic, even though the differences of the two Churches be, for the argument's sake, supposed immaterial, or supposed capable of being conciliated, surely both may and ought to think the reasons far stronger, for not forsaking the profession of his ancestors, than those for conforming to the religion of the State.

And so also, in the same manner, in the unhappy parties in religion, by which many, who unite in the use of the same formularies, are still often found to be separated. To use the word party in the most innoxious sense possible, we certainly often do, and ought to feel ourselves precluded by circum-

stances from joining the party to which our opinions incline. And for the reason already given, that it is far *better*, and more *sincere*, to defer in some things both our opinions and our practice to a just and natural authority, than to disunite any of the links of that bond of Christian charity, which, as its very seat is in the closest relations of life, so in the variety of those cases into which it extends, may often impose restraints on some, which at the very same moment it relaxes on others.

It appears, therefore, I think, clearly, that claims such as have been enumerated, both may and ought to influence our adherence, and choice, in many questions of Church discipline and society. These claims also do, in fact, influence us in every judgment we form concerning the conduct which may fairly be expected from, and the praise or censure due to the conduct of, both those who differ from us on these questions, and those who agree with us. At least, I have never met with any rational person, whether Dissenter or Churchman, who has scrupled

practically to confess their validity. But nothing can be right practically, which is not sincere theoretically: and we shall assuredly be found only to lay a trap for our own consciences, if we attempt to refine them into any pursuit of an abstract sincerity, unconnected with, or unqualified by, the social ties which surround us, or the consideration of *all* those charities public and private by which we both are and ought to be influenced. To take in all their claims therefore, on all points both of opinion and practice, is so far from being inconsistent with the most intire and absolute sincerity, that it even constitutes its exact result and expression.

I may here subjoin, also, that as it is thus plain that, in some cases, we allow without scruple to many of those who dissent or differ from us, that they both may and ought to be influenced by motives and circumstances, of which though they differ from our own, we yet respect and recognize, in their case, the validity; so in cases in which we are not ready to make this allowance,

it becomes us to be watchful that we ourselves are wholly sincere, that we be not induced to withhold it by some undue partiality, some culpable delusion of self-deceit. Our friend, perhaps our relation, one whom we love more dearly than life, may possibly have forsaken, under some mistaken view of sincerity, the communion in which we had been brought up together, or may have embraced a party as much severed from us in all its sympathies, as if in professed or open hostility. I am sensible that this is done often, not from pride, or from affectation, but with the most real and most amiable regret, and only through a weakness as venial as possible. Still the misfortune is, I fear, as common as it is great; and few misfortunes are greater, than thus to see that those who are dearest to us are, through any motive whatever, led to hold so cheaply the tie of affection, as to be tempted to rend it by perhaps mere distinctions of words, or by slight, though real, discrepancies of opinion.

But then, on the other hand, they who suffer from, and who censure, this most un-

happy weakness in others, ought not the less, by the examination of their own hearts, to guard most carefully against the admixture of one evil principle with the just censure they pass on it. Grievous as is, and must be, the disappointment, which they feel necessarily at their friend's alienation, (for it commonly ends in nothing less,) into a region which, if not hostile, is yet foreign, who can wonder at, who can fail to participate, this their natural and affectionate sorrow. But if this disappointment, and even our honest resentment of it, be embittered or aggravated by a secret jealousy of all those, who by leaving the way which we walk in, pass, we think, an oblique censure on those who still continue in it;—if our pride is wounded, because they who, we think, should look up to us, prefer the looking out, well or ill, for themselves;—above all, if we are conscious that we are, in part, ourselves in the wrong, less strict in conduct, perhaps, or less industrious in doing good, than an honest self-examination would tell us we ought to be;—in these cases SELF is

the party whom we ought to bring before the tribunal of our own consciences. It is natural to be the angrier at any slight which is offered to us, when we know that it is not wholly unfounded: and we are ready in the like case to imagine ourselves reproached, even by those who have never thought of or intended, and never been capable even of imagining, a reproach.

It is always to be remembered, also, that in all such cases as these, the law of charity is not only the most amiable, but is also sanctioned by every thing which we can discern of its real tendency and result. There is in the world, no doubt, much rank vice, much baseness of character, much utter pride and malignity. But, in people of any sort of principle, we always find that, the more we know of them, the less we are offended by those distinctions of party, by which we at first may have supposed them most widely removed from us. Nothing is more common, at least with those who live not much in the world, or who have not profited by living in it, than to entertain an actual

horror of some persons, whom they find, when known, to be men of amiable character, and of principles at least less mischievous than they had supposed. This is the case eminently in all those members of religious parties, in which party spirit is not the *basis* of the character. And hence it follows, as has been said, that charity is not only the most amiable, but also the most accurate, guide which we can follow, the most likely to preserve or to conciliate esteem, the least likely to provoke injury. Or if any are even injurious, our rule is still to be charitable. Let us not be overcome of evil, but let us overcome evil with good. Thus only is it possible that we can be in the full sense sincere,—"sincere," as is said by the apostle [b], "and without offence:" and thus, haply, also we shall melt the obduracy of others [c], in the only way in which we can hope to melt it, by giving the evidence that we feel none ourselves.

[b] Phil. i. 10, 11. [c] Cf. Rom. xii. 20.

I have thus, I hope, shewn sufficiently what are some of the chief advantages which Christians may and do derive from that religious fellowship with each other, into which Scripture evidently supposes them to enter. I have also pointed out the principles on which they may and ought to be guided, whether in adhering to, or in dissenting from, any of those particular forms of religion, which may be accounted of as the bond of any such fellowship or communion, and which may come recommended to them by any peculiar authority. And these, it is to be observed, must be the principles of all real sincerity, of that sincerity which takes in *all* our duties, as, in the proportion of their respective importance, possessing an equal claim on us, without allowing any favouritism or partiality[d].

But, before I have done with this subject, I beg to recur somewhat more fully to what has been said, in the preceding chapter[e], of the especial protection which creeds and com-

[d] See chap. i. pp. 13, 17. [e] Chap. iv. p. 99.

munions afford to us against unsteadiness and vacillation of mind, or against the evil spirit of irresolution and scepticism. Nothing, as I conceive, can be more certain, than that to contract a doubting or sceptical habit is far more injurious both to real sincerity of character, and also to the final acquisition of truth, than even some error in the opinions which we form. It might not be so, if we were merely logical animals. It might then be fit for the scale to turn with the slightest impulse. But to us, in point of fact, a degree of *inertia* seems to be desirable, and not less, perhaps, in the moral than in the physical world. That it exists is certain, and is a matter of common complaint[f]: and it may exist also commonly in far too great a degree. There ought not ever to be so much of it, as to impede our pursuit of any truth, which we are able rightly to comprehend or estimate. It should operate less and less, as

[f] Ἀναλαιπωρος τοις πολλοις ἡ ζητησις της ἀληθειας, και ἐπι τα ἑτοιμα μαλλον τρεπονται. Thucyd. See Dr. Whately's Essay on the Love of Truth, p. 24.

the understanding or the capacity is the more and more enlightened and improved. And this, accordingly, I think we see, in fact, that it does. But there should still be enough to save us from that anxiety and flutter of mind, which would rather hinder us from arriving at truth at all. The cords which are drawn around us by institutions and customs, by forms, and creeds, and education, and by the opinions of those with whom we live, are a species of fence, the *τα εσχαμμενα*, which we should always *hesitate* to overleap. Though not to be trusted implicitly, they, I suppose, always conduct or help a man to the knowledge, and belief, both of more truth, and of truth more important, than he could ever, by his own inquiries, have been led to without them. It is his duty, no doubt, as far as he can, to define them more accurately, to exclude, perhaps, some weak points which might serve to harbour an enemy, or even to invade the frontier territory, and bring home the spoil.

But if this is what, from any cause, he is unable or unfitted to do—if he has not

strength enough to leave the rampart which covers him; if any defect or timidity, moral or physical, gives reason to fear, that it may be rash for *him* to adventure himself in the pursuit of even the native loveliness of truth; or that, in the pursuit of some newer truth, he may perchance lose the older and better—his duty in this case will, no doubt, alter with his circumstances. He will then be wise and right, and he will also evidently be sincere, in keeping his steps within the lines which he finds circumscribed, and in applying his diligence to the discharge of other, though meaner, (and yet not perhaps really, or in all cases, meaner,) offices. These meaner offices, however, from the nature of the case, it is not possible that he can discharge with alacrity, unless he has some reliance on those external defences, which he is not able to examine for himself, and for the knowledge of the state and position of which he cannot depend absolutely on the information or authority of those who surround him.

I hold it, therefore, to be but reasonable, that he should bring his inclination in aid of

those arguments by which his anxiety on this point may be averted, and to exclude many fears which his understanding cannot repel. I apprehend this to be a case, in which the reason may wisely combine with that which has been called by Aristotle the irrational part of the soul[g], and that in this combination she may concede *something* to her ally. That our reason can do this, if we will, is one of the most uncontested facts whatsoever[h], and we have to regret that it is too often done insincerely. But that it may be done in full sincerity, is no less evident. And it is plain also, from what we know of the many follies of sceptics, and even of the credulity for which they are often notorious, that a very disputative and discursive habit of mind, a habit which all those motives, of which I have here spoken, may have been in part intended to counteract, is more un-

[g] Eth. book i. chap. ult. I would beg leave to refer also to my Inquiry into Human Motives, part ii. chap. vii. §. 2. pp. 230, et sqq.

[h] Dr. Whately's Essay on the Love of Truth, p. 23.

friendly than many notorious prepossessions and prejudices to the pursuit of truth altogether.

I must beg also to subjoin, that if any should admit that these principles apply with justice to the case of the ignorant and uninstructed, it were high arrogance to imagine that, though in some respects in a less degree, they do not apply also to the better informed. Men of education, no doubt, ought always to be the most unfettered in the pursuit or study of truth. But in the pride of knowledge, and in the temptation to be ingenious, they too have perturbing forces to deal with, of a peculiarly dangerous nature and character, and to be resisted only by the temperate use of the same aids and assistances, to which nature, and feeling, and, it appears, the very constitution of our nature easily disposes the more ignorant to resort. For them, no less than for the ignorant, the beaten road is mostly the safest; and they may both be allowed and expected to resist many temptations to leave it, to which they may not always have an answer at hand.

"A man," says Taylor, "may prudently and piously hold a conclusion, which he cannot defend against a witty adversary[1]." And this is no less the case, even though the wit be his own, and he himself his own adversary.

To all these arguments, also, it is surely to be added that, with so much consciousness of intellectual weakness, with so much experience of moral error, as almost every man must confess and lament, there are but few, very few of us, who can ever dare to rely with security on the unsupported verdict of their own understandings. Who is there of us all, who cannot recur to some opinion, which he has himself held with the most honest pertinacity, but which has now faded away from him as a mere vision of fancy, or as one of the illusions of his childish imagination? How many of us must have discovered, that much, which we have followed with avidity, is but a baseless fabric after all,

[1] *Ductor Dub.* book i. chap. 1. vol. xi. p. 412. Heber's edit.

and that though "there are many ancient errors, there are but few new truths."

Almost all will allow, that these grounds are sufficient to justify us in placing some dependence on authority, that to some dependence reason proves it to be entitled. But I think they do even more. I think that in cases in which we must *suffer*, in which we become distracted by anxiety or doubt, or in which we lose the supports necessary to virtue, by reposing on authority that weight only which our reason tells us is due to it, we may sincerely and conscientiously give *more* weight to it, by throwing, though with cautious reserve, some virtuous prepossession into the scale.

Neither in the premises thus laid down, nor in the inferences derived from them, am I capable of perceiving any mistatement or error. But in an argument like this, no one, it is probable, forms a conclusion without some reference to what he may have observed to pass, in reality, in the minds of persons placed actually in the case we

are speaking of, distressed by their inability to see their whole way clearly or certainly, and by the fear of leaning on their own understandings. Let us place then a man before us who has employed much thought and attention on the study of the evidences and doctrines of our religion, and who has been honestly convinced of their truth. Yet this very person, if his character be irresolute, his turn of mind melancholy, or if he be without a cheerful conviction of the perpetual goodness and superintendence of God, could perhaps easily reason himself into a most unhappy spirit of Pyrrhonism, a state of mind no less unfavourable to the just and real perception of truth, than to the virtue and happiness of all who allow themselves to contract it. His mind may be full of the ends and shreds of a thousand doubts and difficulties, which, if unrolled by a perverse ingenuity, might easily terminate in that disastrous result. That result we indeed account to be irrational, as being produced not by the proper use, but on the contrary by the abuse of his reason; and we may

have no fear of being ourselves betrayed into it. Habit, temper, reason itself, may be, we trust, with God's blessing, our sufficient protection. But he who, unhappily, has lost any of these safeguards, ought to shut out voluntarily many occasions of perplexity, which we may think that we ourselves are able to deal with, but which might deprive *him* both of all power of usefulness here, and of all anticipation of heaven hereafter.

To this very case, also, whenever we see it, do we not always actually give the advice, which I have stated as the advice which ought to be given? Does not the obvious wisdom of the practice teach us the certain necessity of the rule? It has been truly observed, that almost any man may *bring himself*, if he will, to believe almost any thing[1], and that it is wholly incompatible with the love of truth so to do. But it is also not less easy for men to *bring themselves to doubt*, than it is to *bring themselves to be-*

[1] Dr. Whately's Essay on the Love of Truth, p. 23.

lieve, any thing: and this tendency, which I apprehend is the more mischievous of the two, is not less to be resisted than the other, and may be resisted in equal sincerity.

CHAP. VI.

OF RELIGIOUS SINCERITY, AS AFFECTED OR INFLUENCED BY A VARIETY OF BUSINESS OR STUDY, AND BY A TEMPERATE INDULGENCE IN, OR USE OF, AMUSEMENTS.

It appears then, that sincerity of principle must necessarily have reference, in some things, to the moral and social circumstances in which we are placed.

I shall now proceed to inquire what it particularly allows, or exacts, in relation to our conduct in the common business of life, in encouraging, or in restraining us from, a variety of pursuit and of study, and in sanctioning, or not, a temperate indulgence in, or use of, the common amusements and relaxations of mankind. It is the notion of many, that, with the hope and fear of the future before us, and with the Gospel in our hands, full of so many affecting incidents of the

life, and of the death, of our divine Instructor and pattern, we can scarcely be sincere, either in our faith or our practice, if we attend to any other considerations whatever: that the contemplation of religious truth, and the doing those duties which religion *specially* presses on us, is, or ought to be, the real Christian's sole occupation.

It is, indeed, on the other hand, no less plainly the order of Providence, that the affairs of this world only should constitute the chief occupation of the greater part of mankind. A grinding necessity compels the larger half of our species to labour incessantly for the sustentation of life: and even on those in easier circumstances there are usually other claims almost equally urgent, which must be allowed to fill the larger portion of their time. From all persons so situated it is agreed, that religion will always be satisfied with that attention and improvement, that degree of religious knowledge and moral exertion, which, and which only, it is in their power to give.

The world, moreover, although religion, beyond all doubt, ought to be accounted the primal interest which it contains, is full of other objects also, which must have been intended to communicate pleasure, and to excite and gratify rational curiosity. The songs of birds; the playfulness of a kitten; the sports of children, which even the most demure education can never wholly suppress; are of themselves proof incontrovertible, that there is an abundance of physical, and unreasoning, and instinctive happiness, which it has been the will of God to create. It is equally plain, also, that our intellectual faculties, the more we exert them in the investigation of the works of nature, find the more to observe and to discover, and that by such exertion they are always strengthened and improved. We cannot doubt, therefore, but that this use of them must have been intended. In the same manner, the science of numbers, and the investigation of history, and, indeed, of the whole compass of human knowledge, are studies which God must have designed us to prosecute, or he

would not have qualified us to apprehend and retain them.

But though all this be so clear, that I would hardly argue with any who doubt it, it may still be held that the *Christian's* business should be his religion exclusively. There is much, doubtless, in the world, which, though the unquestionable order of Providence, it yet cannot be his order that all men should do. It is plain from Scripture itself, that it is not required of all men to receive equally the same saying [a], the same precept, the same attainment and instruction in religion. Yet all who can are even required to be perfect, so far perfect, at least, as our weak human nature possesses the capacity of apprehending perfection. It is far from being apparent, therefore, that though it is the order of nature and Providence to fill the world throughout with a most luxuriant variety of occupations and pleasures, of studies and of amusements, that, therefore, God's best servants must be

[a] Matt. xix. 11. Compare 1 Cor. vii.

permitted the use of them all. To them, in particular, a severer rule may be given. And yet there are some pleasures so innocent, there is some curiosity so instinctive, on points unconnected either with our own immediate necessities, or with any immediate end of religion, that there are none, I suppose, but the merest fanatics, who would deny to every truly good Christian all these pleasures altogether, or extinguish in him all these curiosities.

The truth is, that here, as almost universally, all depends upon circumstances. Would our Saviour, it is asked,—he whom we confess to be our type, and example; or would St. Paul, if now on earth,—engage in any thing of worldly study, or mix in any worldly amusement whatever? Suppose then that they would not:—but are you who ask a St. Paul? That holy apostle, armed with the panoply of inspiration, and with his great natural powers all excited and bent to his work, had no other duty incumbent on him, but that of preaching the Gospel, and was of too sublimed a character, perhaps, to

find either rest, or repose, in any of the ordinary relaxations of mankind. "Go thou, therefore, and do likewise," if thou canst. And I trust there are many even now, in all classes of life, whose meat and drink is to do the will of their heavenly Father, and in whom we may allow that it would be a species of incongruity to pursue with avidity any study but that of the Gospel, or to indulge habitually in some of those lighter amusements which they permit unscrupulously to the generality of mankind.

The perception of this *truth*, that there ought to be a stricter rule for some, even though there is only a laxer rule incumbent on others, must have been one of the chief originating principles of those various ascetic and monastic establishments, which took their rise in the early history of the Church. It is the perception of the same truth *now*, which leads so many in the world itself to assume a severity both of language, and of demeanour, which has the effect of severing them from all who do not adopt it, though

persons as honest, and as well meaning, as themselves.

But truth so held becomes of necessity error itself. And few errors can be more mischievous than to suppose, that every true Christian ought to act on a principle which, if it be a just rule of conduct at all, can be a rule for only the most perfect and the most sublime. St. Paul himself has told us, that there are babes in Christ who need milk, in the same sentence in which he speaks of those to whom strong meat is the more useful and the more appropriate food; and it is to be observed also, that he speaks even of these last, not as of persons strengthened by the use of strong meat, but rather as able and fitted to use it by reason of their habitual strength[b].

It is perfectly clear, therefore, that a diversity of rules must be adopted, both to abridge in some cases, and to extend in others, the boundaries of the field of Christian liberty. The highest and noblest office

[b] Heb. v. 12—14.

to which the Christian can ever devote himself is, doubtless, to the immediate service of his Master; and some of those who do this, may have little occasion, and less disposition, to enter on, or engage in, any less hallowed pursuit. But even St. Paul, who could have wished that all men were like himself[c], has shewn that he knew this could not be expected. Temper and station, riches and poverty, friendships, connections, abilities, and opportunities, tend all of them to vary the path we ought to walk in,—are as much to be considered in regulating our indulgences and abstinences in the peculiar province of religion, as in determining our choice of any worldly profession.

I shall first therefore consider a few cases, which may serve to exemplify the principles on which our religious sincerity may be either promoted, or otherwise, by taking in some other object besides religion, as a main occupation or business of life; and I shall then proceed to the case of some of those lighter

[c] 1 Cor. vii. 7.

pursuits or studies, which are properly to be accounted of merely as amusements or relaxations.

I. First, then, as to the head of business. I would on this head ask the question of any one, who has looked with an observant eye on human society, whether he cannot name many instances in which the most ordinary pursuits and professions have proved in fact a security to men's religious feelings and principles, which they could not have reasonably and safely dispensed with. Religion is, no doubt, in point of value, the paramount object of all men. But still there are many, who, if they pursue this object alone, are on that very account, it may be feared, the less able to gain it. This great object is of all objects the most elevated, but for that very reason it may hide most readily in its bosom the alloy of baser affections: for that very reason it affords to the principle of self-deceit all its most plausible and dangerous colouring[4].

[4] Human Motives, pp. 76, 252, 255.

From all such dangers we can have no protection so effectual, as in treading some of those paths of diurnal interests or pursuits which shew us always both our own characters and those of others in their clearest and justest light*. Even that rigid necessity, which may be said to chain a man to his desk, will often nurture up in him powers, or at least a temperance in the application of his powers, which he could never have acquired, if he had made the study of religion (including in that study the study and business of propagating it) the exclusive object of his life. Religion is or ought to be to him still, his guide and his solace, his *rule* to which every thing else is referred. But he holds it in the more sincerity, because it is also, in a certain sense, rather the *salt*, or *condiment*, of some more visible or tangible pursuit, than in itself the material or substantial *food* of his mind.

Let me again say, that I do not mean by these observations to lay down maxims for

* Human Motives, p. 255.

all men. I cannot be ignorant that our Lord's personal disciples were commanded to forsake all and to follow him, or that the study and teaching of religion, as it must be always the noblest, so is often the fittest and most appropriate business, which the Christian can be ever called on to discharge.

Our inferences, however, from these observations, though we apply them only as we ought, will be found to extend to a great variety of cases. They extend to shew, that, in all institutions for the bringing up youth, if we confine their education to the study and practice of religion alone, the end may often be lost by the very means which we take to further it. They shew, that, in those institutions, it may be wise to infuse a large portion both of the business and of the literature of the world. And they shew, moreover, the reason why the opinions and practice of good men, even in the comparatively uneducated walks of life, deserve always, as they doubtless do deserve, great attention and deference from the most intellectual inquirers after truth. It is the reproach of

philosophy, that, after all the exhaustion of mind, all the evolution of the stores of sacred and profane learning, which are often bestowed to attain the theory of our duty, we commonly find that the uninstructed peasant has got at the kernel, while the scholar is still occupied in breaking the shell. The reason is, that he is less liable to deceive himself, that the positive certainties of all the objects which surround him, and often the hardships which he is doomed to experience, are too close to him to allow his vision to be intercepted by the *nebulæ* which encompass them in the sight of distant observers. But that which a real and rugged necessity thus does for the poor, it is seldom that any thing but actual *business* can do for the rich,—and business also by its nature conversant not with mere abstractions or contingencies, but with the plain realities of life.

It is clear, therefore, I think, even setting aside that law of necessity, which enforces in most cases, whether we will or no, a continuous and painful attention to the duties of

a particular calling, that to have such a calling must be, in general, best for us, on the whole. It is far from being necessary that, on this account, our lives should be the less religious, whatever that particular calling may be. The proper office of religion is to sanctify every calling, by teaching us in what spirit it should be pursued. We have been told of Alfred, and of others, that they divided their time into portions, each portion of so many hours, and one systematically devoted to business, another to necessary repose and refreshment, and another to pious exercises and studies. But on this it has been well remarked, that though that practice may have been wise and exemplary, yet religion is to be considered more rightly as a principle which pervades the whole texture of life, than as occupying any *portion* of it, be that portion ever so large. Some one (I think Doddridge) has happily expressed this remark in a couplet not unworthy of being remembered:

> Seven hours to books; to soothing slumber seven;
> Ten to the world devote; and *all* to heaven:

and this on the very same principle, on which, for the reasons which I have stated, I suppose that the real healthiness and sincerity of our religious character may ordinarily most safely be maintained.

It may also, I think, be easily proved, that not only on application to some business or study, other than that afforded by religion itself, is thus ordinarily conducive to the true health of the mind, but also that, according to circumstances, our business ought to be various, our studies more or less unconfined. For not only, as is most certain, the more extensive our knowledge, the more means and appliances we have both for apprehending clearly, and enforcing strongly, all the more important doctrines and duties of our faith: but, farther also, we avoid, by taking a wider survey of truth, that contracting influence on the mind, which the taking a partial view must possess, though it be of a part even of the truth itself. If we give (for doubtless this is the first point) to any one great object or more, enough of concentrated and undivided attention to nourish

and bring out our mental faculties, every thing else which we can acquire is, in general, so much clear gain. It both fills a chasm, which, it is probable, would else be left empty, and is also a material security to us that we do not overrate the size and importance of the objects by which we are most nearly environed[f].

II. From the case of a variety of pursuits, we come naturally to the head of amusements; and the more naturally, since, indeed, many useful pursuits are ordinarily pursued chiefly as relaxations. Languages, history, chemistry, botany, and even many far less intellectual studies than these, are found to partake of this twofold character. So amicable almost always, in every intelligent mind, is the combination between instruction and pleasure. There some objects may also often, with great propriety, be pursued as a business, and with as much vigour and industry, as that with which men follow

[f] Human Motives, part ii. ch. vii. §. 3. p. 238, &c. where this point is very fully considered.

a trade. It is my object, however, here to consider them in the light of relaxations alone, not as any principal end of the student, but only as the accompaniment of a life directed to other ends, ends in themselves either of greater worth, or of a more absolute necessity.

There are some, I believe, who would in this light proscribe them entirely. Yet few go so far as to disallow altogether the temperate enjoyment of intellectual pleasures, pleasures which disclose on all sides, even to the mere searcher after novelty, some mark of the wisdom, or some testimony to the benevolence, of the Almighty Father of all.

As we proceed, however, we shall find, even among people not wholly absurd, an augmenting disposition to inhibit farther concession. Many who will allow of history, would bar our access to what are called mere books of entertainment. Many who will allow of poetry, refuse to tolerate plays. Many who will grant us gardening, would deprive us of music; and games both of chance and of skill are often specially repro-

bated, not only by persons whose sombre character of mind forbids us to repose much weight on their judgments, but also by many whose good sense on most other points we reasonably and justly respect.

The natural inference from all this diversity of opinion on a point so eminently and indeed entirely practical is, that as no line certainly can be drawn to define universally either those recreations and amusements which we may, or those which we may not, account of as admissible, so we are left all of us to draw the line for ourselves, in reference to our own circumstances and character. Nor in drawing this line ought we to be exceedingly minute or exact. Virtue and vice do, indeed, mingle in every thing; but these things, which are not of the essence of either, and which may be said properly to "perish with the using," it is absolute superstition to invest with so much importance, as to rest any degree of weight on the distinctions between them. And this is the more obvious, when we observe the utter insignificance of

most of those distinctions which are alleged. Many a young lady, for example, is allowed to *work* in the garden, who is not allowed to *play* on the pianoforte. Yet what good either the mind or the fingers can derive from the first occupation, which they may not derive equally from the second, it would surely puzzle ingenuity itself to discover. The fact is, that all amusements which are not evil in themselves, or which have not in them essentially the nature of sin, can be rendered sinful only in their abuse. And thus even with regard to those *games* which are often perverted to the worst of purposes, "it is alike," says Taylor, "in all; for I know no difference; money is the way to abuse them all: and cards and dice, if there be no money at stake, will make as good sport, and please the mind as well, as any of the sports of boys, and are as innocent as push-pin[s]."

All this, however, is evidently with the

[s] *Ductor Dub.* Works, vol. xiv. p. 337.

reserve, that no mere amusement be ever permitted to intrude disproportionably on any essential business of life, more especially on that great business of all of us, the preparation for a state, where both the business and the amusements of this life will appear to us as little better than a strenuous idleness, or than the childish sports of infancy. Both our necessary business, and our legitimate recreations, will then, we believe, seem to us to have only been, what the child's rattle is to him, a useful food, indeed, and occupation for the mind, in its early and incipient progress, but still as only elemental and preparatory.

Also, let us not forget, that whatever liberty of amusement, or business, we think ourselves, on any account, entitled to allow, we yet allow only to that imperfection of nature, which cannot yet expand itself to see all things in God, or to make his immediate service its sole occupation. It is no part of true wisdom, certainly no part of Christian humility, to disguise from ourselves that weakness, which makes the effort to do so

sometimes both a dangerous and an illusive attempt. At the same time it is to be remembered, that we are but too apt to seek for excuses in that weakness itself; that it is our duty to learn to remedy it as far as we can; to learn to dispense, if not wholly, yet in a greater degree or a less, with occupations which are not only transitory, but also trifling, and suitable only to the child, and not to the man; and to place our *happiness* in virtue alone. We may be overtaken by a lassitude, which we must try to invigorate; by disappointments, in which we require to be cheered. To gain these ends I would shut out no source of refreshment, by which we can ever be benefited in any region whatsoever of that wilderness of this world in which we stray. But the "accomplished[h]" Christian, even in this world, finds his most grateful solace and sustenance in studying the word, and in applying himself to the service of Him who has promised, what He will most assuredly perform; that "he

[h] τέλειος.

that cometh to Him shall never hunger, and he that believeth in Him shall never thirst[1]."

[1] John vi. 35.

CHAP. VII.

THE SAME SUBJECT CONTINUED, AND OF THE CONDUCT DICTATED BY RELIGIOUS SINCERITY, IN RESPECT OF SOCIAL INTERCOURSE, AND OF COMPANY.

THE reader will have observed, both in the preceding chapter, and also in those which have gone before it, a great stress laid on the principle, that since the moral powers and opportunities differ widely in different men, so their rule of life must differ accordingly. And I do, indeed, apprehend, that the preservation of a truly religious sincerity depends very materially on the perception and application of this principle. I shall, therefore, proceed to some of its particular bearings on the case now more immediately before us, that of the relaxations and amusements which our Christian profession may allow or encourage, and which it may be

permissible or proper for us temperately to use. Character varies so exceedingly, that the same appliances which are soothing to some, prove only irritating and oppressive to others. There are some who are blessed with an equanimity so habitual, and with spirits at once so gentle and so steady, that they appear to require nothing more either to virtue or happiness, than the religious interchange of benevolence and of devotion.

But then there are others, also, of a far more rapid current of mind, which would fret and torture itself into agony or enthusiasm, unless employed on a greater variety of objects. There are some, I believe, who can preserve a constancy of attention in the most reiterated prayer and thanksgiving to God: but there are others who, even with the most painful exertion, cannot suppress the distressing wandering of their thoughts. I am sure, also, that it does not follow that they, who are on such points the more volatile, must on the whole also be less sincere in their religion.

Caia and Titia are persons to neither of whom it is perhaps possible to assign any just preference over the other. Yet hardly any two beings can be found more strongly contrasted. The first is all calmness, the second all animation. The first so contemplative as almost to wish herself a nun; the second so active, that, if her frame were less elastic, it would soon wear itself out by its own energy. Caia is a great reader, and of religious writings exclusively. Titia is rarely seen with a book in her hand, and has been known to fall asleep over a sermon. Yet both are equally pious, and both on the same high principle are occupied equally in the great work of doing good. And if the life of the one be the more intirely fixed on God, yet the other breathes forth occasionally the more sublimated devotion, and displays the more heroic disinterestedness. Who shall say that to these two characters the rule of life is the same, or that many lighter occupations or interests may not be good for the one, which are wholly

uncalled for by and unnecessary to the other?

And this is the case, also, I think, still more decidedly with regard to the mixing in company, than with regard to indulgence in any particular art or amusement. The intercourse of society is far more useful and exhilarating than any amusement whatever. Almost all who do abstain from it become contracted, if not morose, in their views both of human nature and of the world. And thus the Scripture, almost universally, considers society as the natural element in which the Christian has to live: and I can scarcely suppose it to have been without some particular meaning, that even our Saviour chose a festive entertainment as the scene in which he first publicly manifested himself.

I beg it to be observed also, that I do not apply the word company to any assemblages which, whether directly or indirectly, are occupied primarily with religion. A religious *conversatione* is one of the worst things in the world. It bewilders the ig-

norant, it seduces the fluent, substituting almost always some delusion of the imagination in the place of real holiness and sincerity. On this head I shall, however, speak farther in the following chapter. I shall here, therefore, only add, that I believe that all religious advice or instruction ought either to be looked for in books, or learned from formal discourses, or from private converse or consultation with those instructors or friends on whom we rely. With few exceptions, I suppose that these are the only ways in which we can reasonably hope to profit by it.

On these points of amusements, and of company, I must also refer more particularly to what has been already said, that the true principle of sincerity requires of us not only to keep in view the wants and necessities of our own character, but also the position in which we stand with regard to society, and particularly towards our nearest connections[a]. No Christian, as has been said,

[a] Chap. v. p. 96, et sqq.

can be truly sincere, who does not endeavour to keep equally the whole law; or who is ready to break through, without duly weighing the sacrifice, any of the charities by which he is most nearly surrounded. But I know of no instance in which this rule is more transgressed, or transgressed in a way more deeply to be lamented, than by many, who, under the influence of some ignorant or hasty opinion as to the compatibility of the common manners of social life with the purity of the Christian profession, do not scruple to sever themselves, at least in their conduct and their habits of life, from those to whom they are bound by the dearest and tenderest ties of nature, interest, and regard.

There are two great truths, on a very mistaken interpretation of which this error is almost always founded. The one, that the will of man must never be so dear to us, as to tempt us to any disobedience to God: the other, that conscience, not authority, is our proper guide as to our way and means of obeying him.

Most true, most sacred, both these principles are. But to suppose that, therefore, in points doubtful or trifling, it is our duty to concede nothing to any claims on the other side; or that there is nothing censurable in making those doubts or those trifles a matter of serious weight and importance, is an altogether impotent and mistaken conclusion. It may be the duty of those around us to treat *our* scruples more kindly and tenderly, than their feeling of mortification at seeing our sympathies alienated from them may, perhaps, allow them always to do. But, whether they do this or not, it becomes us to be sure, not only that our scruples have some real foundation, but also that that foundation is broad and considerable, before we do great real evil by persisting in them. And this evil is to be regretted the more, because they who fall into it are often misled, only by an irresolute and scrupulous temper, and without any the least infection of that desire of singularity, or of becoming the members and perhaps the leaders of a party, from which effects the same or similar

often follow. They are sometimes the victims of mere restlessness and anxiety, without any actually immoral taint whatsoever.

The only objection to these observations worth mentioning is the objection often made, that though there may be many lighter pursuits and amusements, which must indeed be allowed, if used temperately, to be innocent, yet the time spent in them might almost always be better employed, as in the exercises of piety, and of doing good. But this is not the fact, if, as in many instances must be the case, we pursue them not for their own sake, nor yet for our own recreation; but only that we may not, by abstaining from them, violate any of those charities, which it is among our primary duties to maintain. The most trivial occupation, the most unmeaning amusement, if followed not for itself, but for the sake of those whom we honour or love, may, in this way, become an exercise even of piety [b].

[b] "Besides that some may be under such authority and direction, as may oblige them in duty to do what

In cases in which we are more unfettered, or in which the point assumed is true, namely, that our time might be in other ways better employed; in these cases, no doubt, the objection is valid. I would defend no employment whatever which implies, or carries with it, a waste of that most invaluable of all the talents committed to us. And to those happy few, who have the strength and the piety wholly to occupy every moment they can command, without distraction, and without uneasiness of mind, in their heavenly Father's business, to them, undoubtedly, this their strength and their piety is the criterion of their obligations and of their law. But with regard to the majority of us, surely no reason can be assigned, why they who will allow sports to children, because their minds ought not to be always in a state of tension, should deny a degree of the same licence to men. Our minds differ from those

they cannot entirely approve. And then they should endeavour to do it both obligingly and gracefully." Secker, Serm. V. p. 117, 118. vol. i. ed. 1770.

of children rather in degree than in kind. Our pleasures are, perhaps, graver, our pursuits are less vehement. But we are often not less unfitted than children themselves, to hold on steadily, and without unbending, in any one serious pursuit. *Cheerful*, and *social*, and *exhilarating* occupation is often the *pabulum* necessary to preserve or restore the vigour of both our mental and our bodily functions. To suppose or imagine the contrary appears to me to be one of the most obvious fallacies, which good and pious men are ever liable to contract.

This fallacy or error is also to be regretted still the more, because the very occupations which most delight, the very studies which most recreate, or which most soothe, the cultivated and the intelligent mind, tend to enlarge also its opportunities and its capacities. The sports of the child are in fact the rudiments by which he is trained to the thoughtfulness and exertion, which he bestows in subsequent education on that discipline of art, or science, or language, by which the powers of his mind are to be nursed up to

fill with ability the various offices of life. That very discipline becomes afterwards to the man a relaxation which takes, and which fills, that place in his mind which had been left empty by his childish sports. *Alunt* hæc studia adolescentiam, senectutem *oblectant. Quod si ipsi*, proceeds the same eloquent philosopher, from whom I have taken this hackneyed quotation, *quod si ipsi hæc neque attingere neque sensu nostro gustare possemus, tamen ea mirari deberemus, etiam cum in aliis videremus*[d]. Neither yet are these studies valueless as a mere *ornament* of life; as they enable us to fill its offices *gracefully*. Indirectly, moreover, they may be almost religion itself; as they furnish us with a thousand opportunities which spring up abundantly in our most trifling pursuits, of praising, and even of partly appreciating, that fertility of goodness, with which both art and nature overflow.

I would here, also, add farther, with re-

[d] Cic. pro Archia, cap. vii.

gard to that seclusion from amusements and company, which religion is supposed by many to dictate, that few things can be more mischievous than any attempt to make a division between the religious and the irreligious part of the world. It is undoubtedly the intention of Providence that they should be blended together; that the evil should not subsist without the good; that the good should serve to qualify the evil; that the tares should not grow up without the wheat; and that the wheat should not be separated from the tares, till the final day of account shall come.

Every attempt, accordingly, to make such a division tends to pervert a tendency truly religious into a most pharisaical self-sufficiency and pride, seldom alleviated by that affectation of humility which all pretensions to religion carry along with them. On the other hand, also, the effect is often equally evil on the *rejected* part of the public. Almost all persons who see themselves reprobated, who see that men who profess, or endeavour, to maintain a peculiar sanctity of

character, either do not come among them at all, or come only with the tone and attitude of reproach, are naturally offended at this contempt and austerity. This, assuredly, is not that voice of the charmer which can win them in any degree from the error of their ways. And if they also hear practices, which they themselves feel to be innocent, denounced as irreligious or profane; they are thus led not only to retain them with the more tenacity, but are led also into the opposite error of believing, that the appearances of eminent goodness are in almost all men merely hypocritical, or of checking even in themselves their own aspirations after excellence, under the apprehension that they may be dangerous and delusive.

On the other hand, I know not that even the best and the most perfect of Christians, the man most elevated above the *need* of any refreshment, that only excepted which brings him most directly before his God, can *often* execute either a more useful or a holier office than that of exhibiting, not only in the chosen society of the persons most congenial

tunity of promoting what is right, where too generally what is wrong abounds[f]." But all conduct such as this the very highest motives will warrant, and it may be dictated even by religion itself.

[f] Sermon V. vol. i. p. 118. ed. 1770.

CHAP. VIII.

OF THE DANGERS IN REGARD TO SINCERITY TO WHICH TEACHERS OF RELIGION, AND THE MEMBERS OF SOCIETIES PROFESSEDLY RELIGIOUS, APPEAR PARTICULARLY TO BE EXPOSED.

THE principles of religious sincerity, which have been laid down in the preceding pages, may, I hope, be found easily applicable to all the practical cases, which our observation or our experience may suggest. But the case of teachers of religion, or of persons engaged in its direct propagation, and that of the members of professedly religious societies, appear to me to deserve a special consideration; both because there are no other cases whatever in which self-deceit is so hard to avoid; and because, consequently, there are no persons who delude themselves more easily as to the real motives

on which they act. In most great objects, especially if they are distant and undefined, there is often, or usually, something dazzling. There is usually some false light in which we are apt to behold them, and which has the effect of luring us out of the right way, unless we use a more than ordinary caution to keep within those boundaries of rule and of precept, which may fence us off, and protect us, from error. The armour of the faith will, indeed, protect us every where: but it is always most incumbent on us to put that armour warily on, when we address ourselves directly to defend or promote the cause and interests of the faith itself [a].

The character of Balaam, particularly in the masterly delineation of it, which we possess in one of Butler's Sermons, is justly considered as a very remarkable example of the power and malignity which self-deceit may exert in minds by no means unprincipled in

[a] See before ch. vi. p. 121. and the Inquiry into Human Motives as there referred to, p. 76, 77. and 252—255.

religion [b]. Principle Balaam had, at least to a certain extent: he had a degree of piety, a degree of reliance upon God. The history clearly pourtrays in him a temper and feeling, which, if uncontradicted by the other parts of his conduct, would induce us to think that he must have possessed a high rank among the most faithful servants of God. "If Balak," he says, "would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of the Lord my God, to

[b] Balaam is supposed by some to have been a mere idolater, and to have adored Jehovah only in conjunction with Peor, and on that principle of intercommunity of worship which has existed, probably, in all ages among Polytheists. By others he is called an impostor. But that he had not enough of principle to be alive to, or affected by, the noble sentiments which he uttered, sentiments which breathe, certainly, a far greater power than his, and that he did not really believe himself to have any prophetical power at all, or any communication with the Divinity, appear to me to be very absurd suppositions. The case is, at all events, sufficiently applicable for the purpose of example or illustration, in the manner in which it is stated above.

do less or more[c]." "How shall I curse, whom God hath not cursed; or how shall I defy, whom the Lord hath not defied[d]." "God," he exclaims again, "is not a man that he should lie: neither the son of man that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good[e]?" Yet Balaam, notwithstanding all this, studied to cheat the God he believed in; to attain ends, which he knew that God disapproved of, by means which he must have known that he disapproved of still more[f].

Such, briefly, is the remarkable character, of which the fuller exposition by the admir-

[c] Numb. xxii. 18.

[d] Numb. xxiii. 8.

[e] Numb. xxiii. 19.

[f] See Numb. xxxi. 16. and Rev. ii. 14. The prophet Micah also attributes to Balaam one of the most beautiful summaries both of morality and religion which Scripture is found any where to contain, and states it also as spoken in answer to an express question as to the value of legal or ceremonial observances. Micah vi. 8.

able and penetrating writer to whom I have referred, may well teach every Christian the necessity of a careful regard to his own watchfulness over himself. But we have to remark also still farther, that it may have been Balaam's office of prophet, which in part enabled him thus to disguise from himself the deep corruption of his heart. Proud of that office, he may have ceased to humble his mind before Him, who, in bestowing spiritual illuminations, does not always accompany them with the better and holier gift of a real and undeviating religious sincerity [s]. Conscious of faith, he may have deemed that faith his security, although permitting himself, under some deception or other, in practices which on the least consideration he could not but be sensible were false and impious. Or vain, on the other hand, of his merits in keeping the letter of the precept, he may have blinded himself the more easily to its spirit, and its intent. On all these suppositions of motives, which

[s] Compare Matt. vii. 22. and 1 Cor. xiii. and xiv.

may all have really operated on him, and are not by any means inconsistent with each other, his prophetical office may have been the mask, the stalking horse, which he used to impose on himself. If he had not had that office, though he might have been a more unprincipled man, it is improbable, perhaps impossible, that he could have deceived himself so much. No other of Balak's advisers, though he might have advised the same measures, could have retained the same confidence in his own inviolable sanctity, or could have dared to imagine that, even while transgressing a known duty, he still could not go beyond the commandment of the Lord, "to do less or more."

This view of the case, also, is but too much borne out by what we learn from the apostles of the admixture of pride, insubordination, and covetousness, with the better motives of some teachers of Christianity even in the earliest age of the Church [h]. These

[h] See the passages referred to in the preceding note; to which may be added, 2 Cor. ii. 17. iv. 2. and Phil. i. 15. ii. 3.

men, men far less guilty than the Arab prophet, and some of them, we may hope, good men on the whole, we must yet account of as very imperfectly sincere, as men very culpably self-deceived or misled. That the very worth of their professed object must have in part helped to mislead them, it would be highly unreasonable for us not to conclude. And the case is the same also throughout that wider dispersion in which our religion has in modern ages extended itself. It is the case with all, who, while they contemplate the goodness and greatness of whatever end they propose, suffer themselves to see nothing of the vice of the means, of the unsanctified affections by which they are influenced in the way they take to arrive at it. No one, I trust, can imagine that I am here speaking with any general censure of a class of men, who as they possess the high privilege of being employed directly to teach the doctrines of religion, so, we may hope, ordinarily cannot fail to apply to themselves the lessons of caution and humility which they teach. But

still it is not to be hoped that this privilege can be ever possessed, without incurring also the *danger* annexed to it.

Supposing it, therefore, acknowledged, that these principles are true, I now propose to trace out some of the practical applications which we may most usefully and most clearly connect with them.

I. The first of these applications, which I would specify, is, that, as the professed teachers of religion are thus, it is to be feared, the more liable, by the very reason of the office they fill, to the danger of self-deceit, unless they exert a corresponding caution and vigilance, so the members of all philanthropical and religious societies are, as members of such societies, more exposed to this error, than they can be exposed to it merely as individuals. Experience, I conceive, on this point is clear; and we may observe, accordingly, that all persons of prudence are always inclined to view with jealous anxiety many well-meant institutions, which, but for the experience of the evils attendant on them, they would often be prompt and

ardent to sanction; and to fence them round with reserves, and forms, and qualifications, of which minds more ardent and inconsiderate can seldom appreciate the necessity or the use.

Of such societies or institutions, one, which at first sight may seem most unobjectionable, is the assemblage of Christians for the purpose of mutual exhortation, or the discussion of difficult and controverted points of faith. Yet that such assemblages are so very capable of being abused, that it is the part of wisdom narrowly to circumscribe them, is confessed by many whose natural character of mind would rather have led to advocate and applaud them. The same desire of display, which, even in the time of the apostles, led some into the absurdity of seeking to dazzle a congregation by exhibiting their power of speaking in unknown tongues[1], now leads others to a display, scarcely less unmeaning, of their own eloquence and fluency. Many, of whom the first impulse is to do

[1] 1 Cor. xiv.

honour to God, are soon misled unsuspectingly to put in His place some creature of party, or of imagination, some barren dogma which may be the watchword of their creed, or even some contemptuousness of those great lessons of practical holiness which are the essential doctrine of Christianity itself.

That all this is really the fact, (and indeed it is a fact which would be expected by all who know sufficiently how great the infirmity of the human heart,) experience and authority unite to testify. It is a fact also which shews clearly the extreme aptitude of men to deceive themselves, in a case in which their deception puts on the pretext of religion, or assumes the form, without the power, of godliness. It is certain also that the error, which we in all such cases commonly see, is in fact the self-deception which I have described, and not by any means rank hypocrisy.

"When I was curate of Olney," says the late excellent Mr. Scott, and this in a private letter addressed to a clergyman, "I, as it were, inherited a prayer-meeting, conducted

on the same plan, but not so wild and extravagant as the prayer-meetings in your parish are; but I soon found it needful or advisable to withdraw, and to leave the persons who conducted it to themselves; neither opposing nor countenancing it. Most of them became Dissenters, some dissenting ministers. . . . . In general, I am apt to think, it may be difficult for a minister in the Establishment to form or conduct prayer-meetings, in such a manner as that the aggregate good shall not be counterbalanced, or even overbalanced, by positive evil[k]. . . . The evils which arose from those at Olney induced such an association of ideas in my mind, as probably never can be dissolved. Two or three effects were undeniable. I. They proved *hotbeds*, on which superficial and discreditable preachers were hastily raised up; who, going forth on the Lord's day to the neighbouring parishes, intercepted those who used to attend Mr. Newton. II. Men were called to pray in public, whose conduct afterwards brought

[k] See Note at the end of the volume.

a deep disgrace on the Gospel. III. They produced a captious, criticising, self-wise spirit, so that even Mr. Newton himself could seldom please them. These things had no small effect in leading him to leave Olney. IV. They rendered the people so contemptuously indifferent to the worship of God at the church, and indeed many of them to any public worship in which they did not take a part, that I never before, or since, witnessed any thing like it: and this was *one* of my secret reasons for leaving Olney. . . .

. . . "But 'good is done.' God may do good notwithstanding: but are we to *do evil that good may come?* Does He need our misconduct to accomplish his purposes? Shall we break his laws to promote his Gospel? *Good* is done, but is not *mischief* also done? The mischief is the direct consequence: the good by occasion at most. Such men, Mr. Cecil used to say, have but one side in their account-book: they set down their gains, but not their losses: and these being greater than their gains, they become bankrupt. The prejudice excited among those without, and

the various ways in which, by such practices, the success and spread of the Gospel are hindered, (besides the mischief done to the persons concerned,) warrant the assertion that they are most grievous evils; *bad bills* indorsed sometimes by good men[l]."

The good sense of all this is so admirable, and the conclusion so certain, that we need not look for any further testimony to the existence, or magnitude, of the dangers to which such assemblages as those here spoken of are always necessarily liable. Yet I cannot forbear adding, that the opinion of the lamented Heber, as expressed with his own peculiar mildness of sentiment in one of the most valuable of the precious memorials remaining of him, sanctions and corresponds entirely with what has been said. "The effect," concludes this most amiable prelate, "is not only often confusion[m], but, what is worse than confusion, self-conceit and rivalry, each labouring to excel his brother in the

[l] *Life of the Rev. Thomas Scott*, p. 502—506.

[m] 1 Cor. xiv. 33.

choice of his expressions, and the outward earnestness of his address; and the bad effects of emulation mixing with actions, in which, of all others, humility and forgetfulness of self are necessary. Such too is that warmth of feeling and language derived rather from imitation than conviction, which, under the circumstances which I have mentioned, are apt to degenerate into enthusiastic excitement or irreverent familiarity[n]."

II. That other societies also, besides those here referred to particularly, partake the dangers thus so truly pourtrayed, and some of them, perhaps, in an aggravated degree, the same principles equally prove. All societies whatever, of which either the object itself is vague, or of which the members do not see clearly what they are doing, and are not called forth into any personal acts or exertions, are undoubtedly in their nature so far pregnant with delusion, as to require the greatest caution to guard against it. I do

[n] *Letter to the Clergy of Ceylon. Journal*, vol. iii. 8vo. p. 157.

not mean to blame all such societies altogether, to imply that this delusion cannot be guarded against effectually, or that they may not sometimes do more good, by creating an excitement where it is wanted, than can wholly be neutralized by its corresponding evil. But still the evil to which they are liable ought to be always seen and acknowledged. It is an evil also which, I apprehend, inheres, chiefly, not in the actual formation or object of the greater part of these societies, or indeed of any of them, but rather in the assemblages which are thought necessary to their interests, and which, doubtless, *are* necessary, if their true interests are best promoted by the collection of as large a revenue as possible.

The object of, perhaps, all these societies is, confessedly, most unexceptionable: the contributions which they levy are probably, in the general, wisely expended, and the agents whom they disperse into all parts of the globe for the particular discharge of the various ends they propose must, I am per-

suaded, be, in general, and making only a just allowance for human infirmity, men of great real piety and devotedness.

If books, even if sermons, were the only methods resorted to for the purpose of impressing their claims to support or encouragement, I should apprehend but little from any of those contingent evils which we can but rarely escape altogether. It would still, indeed, remain true, that all the good which we do ourselves redounds more to our own benefit, and is more in the straight line of our duty, than any thing which any society can do for us. But then a society can do much, which we cannot do as individuals; and there is both virtue and piety in that elevation of sentiment, which extends its cares over the whole habitable world, which accounts no ignorance too great, no degradation too hopeless, to slacken our industry in enlightening or in relieving it, which casteth its bread upon the waters, without hope of any immediate return, trusting in Him who even "quickeneth the dead, and

calleth those things which be not, as though they were[o]."

I would not dare, therefore, to discourage, far less to suppress, any institutions which concentrate the strength and charity of numbers on great and good objects, which the mere efforts of individuals cannot, or can scarcely, hope to accomplish.

But what I would argue and inforce is, that in all those excitements and appeals to our sympathies, which meetings, or assemblies, are often organized in order to make, in behalf of such institutions, or of the objects of them, we have always eminent reason to beware that our sympathies do not mislead us. I do not mean that they are likely to mislead us to the support of bad institutions. On the contrary, I am supposing the objects of these institutions not to be good only, but also to be great. But the danger is of our misleading ourselves to think, that because we profess a great object, we are therefore following it in an undivided sin-

[o] Romans iv. 17.

cerity; that our pulses are really quickened by that benevolent or pious affection which we profess, and which we believe ourselves, to feel, and not by any delusive idol of our own mind, or by the equally delusive spirit of party. And the only satisfactory proof we can have that we are not thus deluded, is by uniting the practice of diligent self-examination with the diligent discharge of all those practical duties, which our station presses on and requires of us.

All meetings, therefore, and assemblages for the purpose of promoting pious and benevolent objects, are, and for the very reason, I suppose, of the worth of their objects, the most likely to harbour the contagion of self-deceit. We have much ground, also, to think, that they who have the largest share in conducting them, are in the greatest danger of deceiving themselves the most. Nothing seduces a man so much as his own eloquence[p]. *Sapere*, and *fari*,

[p] See the Quotations from Mr. Scott, and Bp. Heber, before, p. 160—164.

though a very splendid combination of faculties, is a combination not less rare, than it is splendid. And this is seen, also, I think, to be the case universally; not in those assemblies alone which have the larger admixture of the more vehement and questionable passions and interests; but in those also which are the most unexceptionable and sedate. The self-delusions of eloquence inhere naturally in the power itself, and require always judgment to restrain them. But they are the worst and the most malignant, in the proportion in which the cause in which it is exerted is in itself delusive and dangerous.

It was shewn sufficiently in chap. vi. that a variety of pursuit and of study, so far as is consistent with the due prosecution of a particular calling, is and always must be useful, to preserve or promote religious sincerity. This was shewn also to be the case more especially with regard to all those per-

sons who devote themselves to any professed office of great holiness or dignity. That the principles there stated must apply with peculiar force and propriety to the case of a body of clergy, in the condition and circumstances of those whom our own Church brings before our observation, must be plainly visible to every eye. But with regard to those members of that body who are fixed at an early period of life in remote, or insulated, or obscure, parts of the country, I would here be permitted to make some farther observations.

The case, then, which presents itself to us is that of a number of men of good education dispersed in districts, in which they possess but few opportunities of partaking in the society of men of study or of reflection, or of men who are any way *proficients* in those branches of learning which the sacred profession of the clergy most directly requires of them. This defect, or disadvantage, it is, no doubt, our duty to remedy as far as we can, and by such means as may most lie within our power—often by laborious

and solitary application to the peculiar end to which we devote ourselves. But it is the lot only of few to be able to labour *much* in solitude with real advantage either to themselves or to others. To make our studies a source of happiness to ourselves, to enable them to nourish or to invigorate the understanding, they must usually be studies in which we can find others to sympathize with us. And so also to be truly useful to society, we must not keep ourselves too much aloof from it[q]. We must rejoice to share, as far as we innocently can, its pursuits, to shew ourselves to be creatures of the same sensibilities with our brother men, and with those especially with whom we are principally conversant[r]. This too is the most effectual way by which we can hope to protect ourselves from the danger of self-deceit. Against that danger it is one material preservative, to be able to see our own conduct reflected on us in

[q] Ch. vii. p. 147, 148.

[r] Homines sumus, humani nihil a nobis alienum esse putamus.

the conduct of others placed in some measure in the same circumstances, and acted on by the same impulses with ourselves. But this cannot be, if we are either secluded from intercourse with them, or if that intercourse be not of a nature to produce any practical fellowship or union of interests, a union which, I suppose, cannot possibly subsist without some community of pursuits. The more difficult, therefore, it may on any account be to find intellectual food for the mind, the more we must study to multiply the number of *feelers* by which we may be enabled to apprehend all that there is. And we thus multiply also at the same time our means and instruments of attaining that moral end to which all others are subordinate, and which is the result and the prize most ardently to be hoped and desired from all our occupations or pursuits [a].

To this, however, it will be said, that it is the very office of the clergy, to account of

[a] See ch. vii. p. 149, 150.

themselves as a body of men set apart from all the common functions and occupations of life, for the purpose of devoting themselves, or of giving themselves wholly[t], to the duties of their own peculiar profession. And that this is both the duty and the privilege of all who can wisely and happily so employ themselves, not any doubt, assuredly, can exist[u]. But in speaking of a class of society, and of a large class especially, nothing can be more certain than that we must not draw too strictly the line by which their liberties, and indeed their proprieties, are to be judged. To vindicate his freedom, and at the same time to strive after that perfection, which supersedes all practical occasion to use it, is the ground on which St. Paul himself has taken his stand[x]. Or to descend to a case which, as of a less overwhelming authority, may serve even better for the purpose of illus-

[t] 1 Tim. iv. 15. a text which I have heard quoted to this effect.

[u] See chap. vi. p. 118.

[x] 1 Cor. viii. ix.

tration. "I do this," said a clergyman, "once a year, that I may keep up my right, and but once only, lest I should be contracting a habit."

The fact is, that, with regard to the clergy, not less than with regard to persons engaged in any other public or private station of life, the age, the position, the character, the connections, in fine, all circumstances whatever, which either affect them individually, or which affect their relations to society, are points to be considered in adjusting the pursuits or occupations, which they unite with, or deem compatible with, their calling. Among these circumstances, the proper decorums of their sacred profession must, of course, always necessarily be ranked. For though these vary, in some measure, with all variation of circumstances, yet surely no member of the profession can ever be excused for forgetting, that he has undertaken an office far more serious and devotional, than any which the members of any other professions are ever called on, with the same solemnity, to discharge. If this feeling does not pervade

our whole conduct, if it be thrown off altogether even in our lightest pursuits, we must not dare to flatter ourselves that we preach the word in sincerity, or that our heart really goes along with our professions.

Still where Scripture has drawn no line, we must not venture to draw it; and I am persuaded also, that the law, and that all ecclesiastical authorities, ought always, in all such cases, to be exceedingly wary in any definite judgment which they may pronounce. Nor can any one blame more than I do that fanaticism of opinion which would exact from whole classes of men a severity of deportment, which can even become only the most apostolical of their number, or which can dare to close that door of liberty which Christ undoubtedly has left, and which his inspired disciples have in like manner transmitted to us, open.

It has already been shewn, that by the just use of that liberty our Christian sincerity may be often secured. It is consequently our duty to assert and defend it. It is our duty also, on the other hand, to

give "no offence in any thing, that the ministry be not blamed[y]." How to conciliate the vindication and use, with this just caution against the abuse, of the powers put into our hands, must be left essentially to our own discretion. Authority, though it may set before us the principles, cannot and ought not, except on very clear and decided points, to govern us in the detail. Authority, whether civil or ecclesiastical, has always in it something which is of the nature of municipal law; and we know that no man, who squares his conscience by that law only, appreciates, as he ought to do, the law of the Gospel.

To govern ourselves by the law of the Gospel, which is throughout a religion of principles, the principle of sincerity, taking in all its applications, is the first principle to which we have always to appeal. And be it remarked also, that as this principle teaches us not to dismiss too soon, or too peremptorily, any natural and innocent occupations

[y] 2 Cor. vi. 3.

or interests, so, when nursed up by this elementary food, it aspires and assimilates gradually to food purer and more ethereal. That slough of imperfection which cannot, and ought not to be torn from it forcibly, it throws off spontaneously as it advances in growth. That sincerity is fallacious, which forgets the humility of its origin, or is unwilling to acknowledge that the higher and nobler the industry on which it urges us to bestow our exertions, the greater ought to be our caution against self-deceit. Our first duty is to retain the openness and simplicity of little children in Christ; and, if we lose this, we can gain nothing else, which can, by possibility, make us amends. But, retaining this simplicity, it is still in our power to adorn it with manly virtues, and with religious attainments; and to carry up our sincerity from its infant state here, to something of a foretaste of those holier pursuits in which our happiness will consist hereafter.

NOTE

On a quotation in Chap. VIII. p. 161, *from a Letter on the subject of prayer-meetings by the late Mr. Scott.*

Mr. Scott, it is to be remarked, makes the following reserve. "But men," he says, "of far greater capacity and means of judging have thought otherwise; among whom I especially look up to Mr. Walker of Truro, whose regulations I thought very judicious[a]."

This reference to Mr. Walker makes it proper, I think, for me here to subjoin, that I have the best authority for saying, that this excellent man, in a ripened experience, and towards the end of his life, would have agreed entirely on this subject with Mr. Scott.

Mr. Walker, who was born in 1714, became curate of Truro in 1746. My paternal grandfather, a man of learning and abilities, one year

[a] Life of the Rev. Thomas Scott, p. 503.

older than Mr. Walker, with whom he had been at school at Exeter, and afterwards of the same college in Oxford [b], was then vicar of St. Gluvias, a parish nine miles distant from Truro. He was one of the seven original members of a club formed, at Mr. Walker's suggestion, among the neighbouring clergy [c], and kept up a close personal intimacy with him till the year 1760, when Mr. Walker, then in the early stage of a consumption, left Truro, which he never revisited, for Bristol. "My dear friend," were Mr. Walker's last words, at the time when they bade each other farewell, "whatever good you intend to do, you must do it in the church."

That Mr. Walker had ample grounds for the disapproval, which these words implied, of that sort of religious meeting which he had previously been led to encourage, my grandfather himself had very sufficient reason to know. I have heard also, from old people, who were well acquainted with Truro, traditional accounts of the rise and progress, and of the effects, of the prayer-meetings

[b] Exeter College.

[c] Life prefixed to the Sermons, pp. xxviii. and xlviii. edition of 1763.

which were there instituted by Mr. Walker[d]. Of these accounts Mr. Scott's relation[e] of the effects produced by the meetings at Olney is little else than a literal repetition.

To the quotations in page 160 and 163, from Mr. Scott and Bishop Heber, I might add other extracts from the same letters, which would have the effect of shewing still farther, with how very wary a caution these excellent men thought it always indispensably necessary to tread, if the force of circumstances ever induced them to relax their censure of all such meetings as those they speak of. To books so common, however, and so justly esteemed, it is enough for me thus to refer[f].

On this point, therefore, I will only add farther, that, though the writers speak partly as Churchmen, and with some particular allusion to their own position, as actual members and ministers of the Establishment, yet what they say might be applied equally to the general question of religious sincerity, even though there were no

[d] Ibid. p. xxv—xxix. et seq.

[e] See chap. viii. p. 160—163.

[f] *Life of the Rev. Thomas Scott*, p. 502—506. *Heber's Letter to the Clergy of Ceylon.* Journal, vol. iii. p. 154, &c.

Establishment at all. I think, no doubt, and, I am persuaded, could prove, that what they say applies very forcibly in favour of the Church Establishment itself, and of the sobriety with which it is conducted. But whether it applies thus or no, it shews equally how much caution is requisite in adopting, under any circumstances, a line, or licence, of conduct, in which the principle of self-deceit must, from the nature of the case, always of necessity strongly inhere.

THE END.

The reader is desired to correct the following errors.

Page 23. line 6. *for* probably *read* properly
43. 8. *for* deficient *read* different
45. 18. *for* philosophers *read* philosophies
56. 20. *for* care *read* case
76. 11. *for* manuscript *read* manuscripts
77. note, line 2. *for* you *read* ye
88. line 1. *for* of *read* and
99. 4. *for* one *read* an
126. 7. *for* on *read* an
127. 19. *for* There some *read* These same

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